BASIC DOGMATIC TEACHING

An Orthodox Handbook

by Protopresbyter Fr. Anthony Alevizopoulos (1931 - 1996)
Dr. of Theology, Dr. of Philosophy

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Translations of Scriptural Quotes mostly from:
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Introductory Note

It is with special joy and satisfaction that we are delivering to the reading public the 6th edition of the present book.

The reception that it enjoyed from the Orthodox Christian people was admirable, and the critiques that were written and voiced on behalf of Orthodox theological personalities were extremely positive. The reason for this is that the book constitutes an incontestable "Orthodox Handbook" which contains the basic dogmatic teaching of our Church, with a multitude of Scriptural, liturgical and Patristic references. In this perspective, it introduces the reader to the Orthodox faith and way of life; it allows for an Orthodox placement within the modern world, and most of all it offers him in print the unique, in-Christ Orthodox experience, the way that the author himself had lived it within the Church.

The ever-memorable father Anthony Alevizopoulos (1931 -2/5/1996) was a truly indefatigable Levite of our Church; one of the leading students of the phenomenon of newly-appeared heresies in the European world, who had served for many years in the neuralgic post of Secretary to the Conciliar Committee on Heresies. Worthy of mention alone are the words written by the (OODE note: now reposed) Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and All Greece: "We have come to know him well, and we can testify that he bore within him the genuine characteristics of an Apostolic man, an unashamed worker of the Gospel. He lived for Christ and the Church. A decent man, replete with the Holy Spirit, modest, a proper overseer of his house, untiring, unflagging, militant, uncompromising, ablaze with divine zeal, an excellent pastor and a most loving father; methodical, ever-toiling, a choice vessel of God and the sword of the Spirit against soul-destroying organizations and movements."

The Apostolic Ministry of the Church of Greece, aspiring to the best possible educating of the faithful people of the Orthodox Church, has embarked on the present, new edition, with impeccable typographical supervision and an alphabetical index, so that the perusal of the book can be more accessible and appealing. It is our hope that in the thorny times that we are going though, this book will continue to edify and support people's wavering souls, as a priceless "Handbook of Orthodoxy".

† His Eminence Agathangelos of Fanarion
General Director of the Apostolic Ministry of the Church of Greece (APOSTOLIKI DIAKONIA)

About the Author

Born in the town of Kazarma of Messinia (Peloponnese) in the year 1931. He was the 11th and last son of a family with many children, born among 9 sons and 2 daughters. He received his basic education in Kazarma and his High School education in Kalamata. He graduated from the School of Theology of the Athens University in 1957 and acquired his PhD in Philosophy in Magentia. He served as an assistant at the University of Muenster. He acquired a PhD in Theology at the Athens University.

He was married to Antonia Lentz, with whom he had three sons.

Ordained a deacon and presbyter by the Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain Athenagoras in 1962 in Stuttgart and served as a parish priest in Hannover and Cologne.

He returned to Greece in 1968 and was assigned as parish priest of the Sacred Temple of the Holy Trinity in the Ambelokipi suburb of Athens (where he continued to serve, until his final rest). He had also contemporarily served as Secretary to the Synodical Committee for Emigrant Hellenism and in 1980 as Secretary to the Synodical Committee on Heresies. He had organized the following sectors of activities: «Classes for Staff of Ecclesiastic Welfare» 1968, «School for Ministry Volunteers» 1971, «Classes for Confronting Heresies» 1976 e.a..

Served as:

Director of the Bureau for Pastoral Confronting of Heresies at the Athens Archdiocese; Director of the Archdiocese's Information Service on Dialogue and Culture; Chairman of the Spiritual Council of the "Pan-Hellenic Union of Parents for the Protection of the Greek Orthodox Civilization, Family and Individual"; the first Vice-Chairman of the "Orthodox Educational Centre for Information and Dialogue"; Chairman of the Spiritual Council of Saint Paraskeva;

Vice Chairman A΄ of the «Interorthodox Union of Parental Initiatives».

As Secretary of the Synodical Committee he had organized a host of Clergy-Laity Synaxes, Conventions, Seminars, Meetings, Pan-Hellenic and Pan-Orthodox Conferences, the "Seminar of Faith", the "Seminar of Edification in Orthodoxy", the "Seminar of Orthodox Faith", the "Theological Seminar".

He authored 40 books of varying pastoral content, which covered the sectors of parishional activity, the demarcation of the Orthodox Faith and the pastoral strategy of the Church against the various heresies.

Together with associated he composed the Bulletins: «Witness», «Inform», «Information Bulletin», «Communication Bulletin». Many of his articles were published in daily newspapers and periodicals. He had two regular programs on the Radio Station of the Church of Greece.

He participated in numerous International Conventions on Parental Initiatives Abroad, in assemblies of the World Council of Churches and Conventions for Human Rights as well as conventions of anti-heresy content, in Russia, Bulgaria and Cyprus.

He departed for the Lord on the 2nd of May 1996, having dedicated his life to the Church and having offered immense services for the support of the Truth of the Faith and the Pastoral opus of the Church.

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...Throughout all his tumultuous life, he was preoccupied with the heresies that attack the weaker members of the Church, who are led into spiritual delusion and confusion, apostasy from God, and the jeopardizing of eternal life. He displayed an apostolic zeal in this matter, as well as a prophetic disposition. ***He reminded me of the Prophets and the Judges of the Old Testament, who were deeply concerned with the spiritual health of the people****. After all, the characteristic sign of the Prophets was their struggle against every form of religious syncretism. The war that the ever-memorable Father waged for many years against heresies had consequences on his person also, as he was confronted by a multitude of various offensives, tests, persecutions, just as all of God's conscientious children are subjected, when they struggle out of love for the sake of "His appearing" (2 Tim.4:8) [...] He worked on analyzing the teachings of the miscellaneous heresies so that those who were weak in faith would not be misled by the leader of heresies', the devil; but he also showed concern for the confession of the Faith, given that in all of his books, he would quote the basic elements of the Faith;* ***he authored the marvellous book "An Orthodox Handbook"*** *and he also created programs for "Orthodox edification", in his attempts to catechize the hundreds and thousands of people who approached the Orthodox Church after painfully wandering around demonic pathways. [...] Whenever I approached Fr. Anthony - especially during his last days - and would hear from his own mouth the difficulties that he had faced, I was astounded. I remember one time when he told me that he wrote and read with the minimal sight that was left in his one eye, since he could not see at all with the other eye. It was then that I was left speechless and rejected even the very few doubts that others had expressed about his person. In his case applied the words of Christ to the Apostle Paul: "****My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.****" (2 Cor.12:9) My admiration increased, when he told me of his Presbytera's illness and his family's difficulties in general. And yet, despite the temptations, he worked tirelessly on that difficult and responsible pastoral labour that the Church assigned to him. I prayed during the period of his sickness. When I was informed of his passing, I felt deeply moved, but also joyous from the point of view that a servant of Christ had departed - a labourer of the Church who confessed Christ and bore His Name, "****before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel****." (Acts 9:15)*

---Rev.Metropolitan of Nafpaktos and Saint Vlasios, Hierotheos Vlachos

I believe that for many years to come, the voice of our Church on the matter of heresies and para-religious organizations will be "the voice of Anthony Alevizopoulos". And I believe I am not exaggerating when I maintain that if we, the "inadequate" ones want to speak correctly in this sensitive pastoral area, we should speak "according to Alevizopoulos". He was the one who paved the way, both for the preventive as well as the therapeutic confrontation of the plague of heresies. His apologetics works are of an inestimable value and are acknowledged internationally. His books will constitute, for many years to come, a basic sector of contemporary Greek and international anti-heretical bibliography, as well as invaluable aids that should accompany every pastor and every parish in their pastoral labours.

---Fr. Kyriakos Tsouros,
Secretary to the Church of Greece's Synodical Committee on Heresies.

The entire works of the Greek Father Anthony testifies to a soul that is ablaze with zeal in favour of Orthodoxy for that portion of Christianity which, with the passing years and despite all the terrifying offensives of its enemies, has remained holy and untainted. God has always preserved for Himself a remnant, a holy portion, of great men, who would bring the Truth to its final and overwhelming victory. Father Anthony is numbered among them, and it fills our heart with joy and hope, seeing that Holy Orthodoxy always has Her own, blessed champions.

---Fr. Dimitri Staniloae

We have acquainted ourselves well with him, and we give witness that he bore within him the genuine characteristics of an apostolic man - an unashamed labourer of the Gospel. He lived for Christ and the Church. A benevolent man, filled with a holy spirit, modest, a proper caretaker of his own house, untiring, unbending, militant, uncompromising, ablaze with divine zeal, an excellent pastor and a very caring father, methodical and hard-working; a chosen vessel of God and the sword of the Spirit against soul-destroying organizations and movements."

---Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Christodoulos

Prologue by the Author

During my long ministry in Germany, I had come to notice the lack of a simplified Orthodox catechesis that could introduce one to the Orthodox Faith and life in a manner that would allow an Orthodox placement in the modern world.

This same absence I had also observed in Greece, where I was called upon to undertake the catechesis of adults who had asked to accede to Orthodoxy. The aids which have been published - if not addressed to young students - did not have the introduction to the Orthodox Faith and life as their main concern.

Apart from this: Thousands of Orthodox brethren migrate without any prior spiritual preparation: workers, technicians, students, members of various diplomatic missions, educators etc.. It is imperative that they all be equipped with the Handbook of our Orthodoxy, so that they can victoriously confront the spiritual perils of a foreign land, and to live the Orthodox way conscientiously there also.

Among those perils is foreign propaganda - especially by the so-called "Jehovah's Witnesses", who work in a very organized manner, to the major detriment of our migrated brethren. To confront this danger, I had published the book "The Dictatorship of Brooklyn", which circulated quite extensively abroad, and especially in Germany.

This preoccupation, as well as the multitude of letters that I had received from readers of the said book, helped me during the composing of this book to take seriously into account those points of Orthodox teaching and Orthodox spiritual life which are rejected by heretics and the cacodox.

Given that these deluded people proclaim that they study the Holy Bible, I took special care to Scripturally back the Orthodox Faith. Instead of using brief scriptural phrases and verses excised from their natural context (as usually done by heretics), I preferred to quote larger excerpts from the Old and the New Testaments, so that this book can also be used as an aid for the study of the Holy Bible.

With regard to the Old Testament, I have mainly utilized the Septuagint translation (into Greek) and have strived to provide the simplest possible rendition of those verses. I also arranged to quote small narrations and excerpts from the Book of Saints and the liturgical books of our Church, in order to evidence the unison between the Orthodox dogma and Orthodox spiritual living, Orthodox truth, Orthodox worship and the Orthodox conscience.

The manuscripts of the present book were studied by: The Most Reverend Metropolitan Fr. Dionysios of Servia and Kozani, Fr. Amphilochius Radovic, Fr. Meletios Kalamaras, and theologians Panayiotis Nellas and Anthony Papantoniou. All of them have provided me with invaluable suggestions, which contributed towards the fullest possible compilation of the book. To all of them I would like to express my warmest thanks. I wish to also thank Professor Fr. John Romanides for his invaluable suggestions on certain topics of the book.

Presbyter Anthony G. Alevizopoulos

Guidelines on the use of the book

For a greater benefit when studying the present book, we would recommend that the reader:

a) studies carefully and without haste, every day, a small segment of the book.

b) tries to think during the day of all the truths that he has studied and strive to live them accordingly, with intense prayer.

c) If he finishes reading the book, he should study it all over again. This time, he should check the Holy Bible to locate the excerpts that are quoted in the book and underline them.

d) On the basis of those excerpts that have been underlined - that is, the teaching of our Church - he should begin a systematic study of the entire Holy Bible, but without ceasing his fervent prayer. Prayer is what we should persist in; that is, to persevere steadily and be alert (Colossians 4:2), so that the Lord might reveal to us "the bounteous understanding, the complete knowledge of the mystery of God the Father and of Christ, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Colossians 2:2-3)

Chapter 1 - The Salvific Truth

1. The Truth is a person

When Pontius Pilate asked Christ if He was King, the Lord replied: "***For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice...***" (John 18:37)

Then Pilate asked: "***What is truth?***" (John 13:38)

But with this phrase, the question was not posed correctly. The truth is not a thing, nor is it an abstract meaning, so that we might ask "**what** the truth is". The truth is not "something"; it is "someone". It is not a thing; it is a Person, and that is the reason we must ask "**Who** is the truth?"

The answer to this question was given by Christ to His disciples. He had told them that He was going to His Father and that He would return to collect them and lead them there, so that they would thereafter all be with Him. "***where I go you know***" He said to them, "***and the way you know*** " (John 14:3-4).

Then Thomas said to Him: "***Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?***"

And the Lord replied to him: "***I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no-one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him"***

Then Philip said to Him: "***Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us***."

And Jesus said to him: "***I have been with you for so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me, has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'show us the Father'?***" (John 14:5-9, cmp Hebr.10:19-20)

All the above are proof that Christ - when speaking of the truth or the path that leads to the Father Who is Life itself - was speaking of the same thing: I am the Truth; I am the Way, I am the Life; whoever therefore knows Me, also knows the Father.

The Truth, therefore, is not something; it is Someone - it is the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ; in other words, the incarnate Logos (John 1:14), Whom we must become familiar with in order to have life (1 John 5:13, cmp John 6:47)

Christ is the truth. Only He can lead man to the heavenly Father, in order to render him a participant of God's life (John 14:6, 17:2-3, Luke 10:22). "***Grace and truth came, through Jesus Christ***" (John 1:17)

However, the disciples of Christ were unable to "contain" this truth under their own power. That is why the Lord was going to send the "Spirit of Truth" - to guide them to the full truth. The Spirit "***will take of what is Mine and declare it to you***" (John 16:12-14.)

From these words by Christ, we can see that the knowledge of God -and theology- commence from the event of the revelation that was manifested in the Person of Christ "***in these last days***" (Hebrews 1:1) and from the event of the presence of the Holy Spirit inside the heart of man.

The Apostles were always near Christ; they would constantly hear His sermons and witness His miracles. However, it was still impossible for them to know the truth through their own abilities.

When, at another time, Christ had asked His disciples to tell Him WHO they thought He was, and Peter replied that He was the Son of God, the Lord replied with those famous words. Basically, that Peter was not led to that truth with his own human abilities; rather, God Himself revealed it to him. (Matthew 16:17)

2. The example of Job

We all know the story with Job. He tried to penetrate the mysteries of God through conversation and logic, without any results. But when God revealed Himself to him, he comprehended that it was impossible for him to achieve on his own that which he desired and was deeply overwhelmed. "***Whereas before I would hear an aural report of You***", he said to God. "***now, however, my eye has seen You; therefore, I disparaged myself and wasted away, and I regard myself as dust and ashes.***" (Job 42:5-6)***,***

Therefore, what is significant is not the words that pertain to God; it is humility and the purity of heart, during one's search for God. "It is a great thing, for one to speak of God", says Saint Gregory the Nazianzene, but he adds "it is an even greater thing, if one cleanses himself for God."

3. The revelation given to Moses

We said that man cannot find God on his own, and that it is necessary for God Himself to reveal Himself inside the heart of a person.

In what manner does God reveal Himself to man? We can observe this, in the example of Moses.

"***And the Lord said to Moyses, "When you go down, testify solemnly to the people, and purify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be prepared for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon the mountain Sina before all the people***." (Exodus 19:10-11)

Elsewhere, Moses receives the instruction from God to take Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy elders and to ascend the mountain, after instructing the population to remain at the foot of the mountain (Exodus 24:1-2)

Moses, according to God's instruction, offers a sacrifice and sprinkles the population with the blood of that sacrifice. He then climbs up the mountain, together with the persons that God had appointed. On the

mountain, Moses' companions did not see God; they only saw "the place where the God of Israel stood" - and that place "***and that which was beneath his feet, like something made from lapis lazuli brick and like the appearance of the firmament of heaven in purity***." (Exodus 24:10)

Moses then received the following instruction from God: "***Come up to me into the mountain and be there. And I will give you the stone tablets, the law and the commandments that I wrote to legislate for them.***" (Exodus 24:12)

Then Moses took Joshua of Navi with him and they climbed to the highest summit of the mountain, which was covered by the cloud. (Exodus 24:13-15)

"***And God's glory descended upon the mountain, Sina, and the cloud covered it for six days, and the Lord called Moyses on the seventh day from the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the Lord's glory was like a flaming fire on the top of the mountain before the sons of Israel. And Moyses entered into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain, and he was there on the mountain for forty days and forty nights...***" (Exodus 24:16-18)

"***...and sounds and lightning and dark cloud were occurring upon the mountain Sina... Now the mountain Sina was smoking in its entirety, because God had come down upon it in fire, and the smoke was rising up like the smoke of a furnace... Moyses was speaking, and God answered him with sound...***." (Exodus 19:16-19; cmp. Deuteronomy 4:11-12 and 5:22)

God, therefore, is found "***in thick darkness***", a dark cloud... (2 Chronicles 6:1 and Ezekiel 10:4). "***He caused him to hear his voice, and he led him into the deep darkness, and he gave him commandments face-to-face, a law of life and knowledge, to teach Iakob a covenant and Israel his judgments [...]***." (Wisdom of Sirach 45:5)

4. Man's receptiveness

Thus, inside the cloud, where it was not possible for Moses to discern anything with his corporeal eyes and with human abilities - God speaks to him and reveals Himself.

This was the way that Moses was able to comprehend that the revelation of God's glory was not the result of an intellectual endeavour, but a work of God - the fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit within his heart.

For God to speak to the Israelites, they had to be cleansed internally and be purified, and the divine revelation was to be analogous to the internal cleanliness of each one of them.

The multitude - which had so many times wavered in its love towards God and in the cleanliness of their hearts - had progressed only as far as the foot of the mountain. As such, it was only able to see the glory of God from afar - like a fire on the mountain top.

Moses' escort had climbed up the mountain together with him, and could see "the place where God had stood".

Joshua of Navi had climbed even further up. Finally, God invited Moses to enter the cloud - on the uppermost point of the mountain - and to remain there for forty days and nights, in order to receive the full revelation of God.

Chapter 2 - Cognizance of the Truth

1. Those taught by God

From what has been said, it has become obvious that when we refer to the "knowledge of God", we do not imply any logical comprehension of Him, but rather a personal encounter with God. When a person surrenders wholly to God and desires to encounter the One that his soul yearns for, only then - after passing through the dense fog of ignorance - will God come to him and make everything around him luminous and will reveal Himself to that person. "***He reveals the deep and secret things, knowing what is in the darkness, and the light is with Him***" (Daniel 2:22). However, man must hunger and thirst truly for God. (Psalms 41:3, Jeremiah 38:25)

But whoever acquires a taste of the presence of the divine light will sense his immense weakness and his vast unworthiness and will shout the words of the sinful woman:

«***Lord, this woman who had fallen into many sins, on sensing Your Divinity did undertake to become a myrrh-bearer***...», and «***Lord, while immersed whole in sin, I can feel Your Divinity!***... ».

All the Fathers of the Church agree on this point and they proclaim that the knowledge of God is a divine gift and not the result of a human endeavor.

Nobody can acquire knowledge of God, unless he becomes one who is taught by God. "There is no means by which we can come to know God - only to live within Him", says Saint Gregory the Theologian. **Saint Nilus the Ascetic also teaches: "If you are a theologian, you will truly pray, and if you pray, you are a theologian"** (On Prayer, 61).

2. The prerequisites of the knowledge of God (Theognosy)

God does not reveal Himself to the man who seeks Him with his intellect.

He reveals Himself to the one who will love Him: "***But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him"***.(1 Cor.8:3) The one who loves God with his heart will hear His voice calling him to pass through the cloud, to ascend the mountain. However, for a man to meet God he must have humility (Matth. 5:3, 18:3, 1 Pet.5:5). Furthermore, he must have a cleanliness of heart (Psalms 33:19) "***Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God", says the Lord*** (Matth. 5:8)

But all these are not enough, for man to attain divine revelation. He needs to also follow the teaching of Christ. "***Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son"*** (2 John 9) "***...whosoever does good, he is of God; whosoever does evil, he has not seen God.***" (3 John 11)

If one is not a man of love, if he does not have humility, if he does not purify himself and does not preserve the teaching of Christ, he cannot be a true theologian - that is, a man who has come to know God. "***...the one who says he abides in him ought himself to walk, just as He walked***." (1 John 2:6) For the one that does not purify himself, Saint Maximus uses an extremely severe expression. He characterizes him as "a demon's theologian".

"***Beloved***", writes saint John the Evangelist, "***now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. .... Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.***" (1 John 3:2-6)

The inner purity of man is not presented solely as a prerequisite for knowing God and as the fruit of his union with Him. The Lord Himself, when addressing the Father, says of His disciples:

"***I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them...***" (John 17:26)

Knowledge of God is an act of giving (Gal.4:9; John 6:44) and presupposes a personal relationship of man with Christ:

«***No-one comes to the Father except through Me***" (John 14:6). "***No-one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except for the Son and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him***." (Matth. 11:27) This personal relationship with the Son is realized - as we shall mention - with the presence of the Holy Spirit. (John 14:26. 15:26. 16:13 and thereafter).

3. Starting point and purpose of the knowledge of God

The starting point of the knowledge of God is, therefore, totally different inside the Church than it is in a philosophical quest thereof. However, its purpose - the end of the knowledge of God - is also different inside the Church.

This purpose was proclaimed by Christ with great clarity, in His prayer to the Father: "***that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.***" (John 17:26)

The starting point of the knowledge of God is the personal acquaintance with Christ, and its end is Love, which is the expression of the life of the Holy Trinity - in other words, man's participation in that life. "***I am in them, and You are in Me, so that they may be made perfect in one***.... ***that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.***" (John 17:23, 26)

Christ is the starting point for the knowledge of God. It is that which John the Evangelist underlines at the beginning of his Gospel: "***And the Word*** (Logos) ***became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth***". (John 1:14) The Purpose and the end of the knowledge of God is the in-Christ life - the perfect unity of man with Christ.

This is the reason that the preaching of the Apostles always had its beginning in the Person of Christ and had as its purpose the tie with Christ and the "in-Christ" salvation (Acts 4:12; 5:28-32).

4. The provocation of the Cross

The person of Christ constitutes the beginning and the end of theognosy and man's redemption. That is the Gospel - the salvific message - that the Lord brought to us.

However, neither the Judeans of the Apostolic era nor the Gentiles managed to accept it. Christ's Incarnation, and especially His Cross and His death, were for the former a scandal and for the latter, folly. The reason for this was that Christ's Cross - as well as His Incarnation - were a huge provocation for human logic.

"***For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God***." (1 Cor.1:18).

"***For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men..."*** (1 Cor.1:22-25. cmp. Gal.5:11).

One could say that here the Apostle is provoking both the Jews and the Gentiles. He does not feel the need to logically support his preaching, nor is he overcome by a sense of inferiority for it. On the contrary, he does this consciously, his purpose being NOT the support of the people's faith on the basis of the power of human words and human wisdom, but "***..in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God***.". "***We speak***," he says, the ***"wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God had ordained before the ages unto our glory***." (1 Cor.2:4-7).

This same teaching was already being proclaimed by the Prophets of the Old Testament, whom the Apostle also invokes (1 Cor.1:19-20)

"***...in vain do they worship Me, by teaching human precepts and teachings. Therefore look, I will proceed to remove this people. I will remove them and destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will hide.***" (Isaiah 29:13-14)

5. The power of the Spirit

The knowledge of God, the true faith, is the result of the sermon pertaining to the Cross. However, the sermon alone is not capable of revealing God to mankind. Just as the sermon has God as its source (Who revealed Himself in the Person of Christ), likewise, the acceptance of that sermon on the part of man springs from the Holy Spirit, Who guides man towards Christ.

"***Now we have received, not the spirit of the world***" says the Apostle, "***but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.***" (1 Cor. 2:12). ***,***

"***...These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the***

Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ..." (1 Cor.2:13-16 - cmp. Isaiah 40:13).

Therefore, it is not a matter of "persuasive words of human wisdom", but "***...in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God***". (1 Cor.2:4-5)

The above help us to understand why many people did not succeed in finding the path that leads to the truth and to life; in other words, the path that leads to Christ. We also comprehend why the Apostles - prior to the event of the Pentecost - were unable to recognize the Lord and perceive His glory.

And even those three disciples - who were present at the mount of the Transfiguration - did not experience at that moment the full majesty of the Lord's glory. The apolytikion hymn of our Church says this quite characteristically, when it presents Christ as demonstrating His glory to His disciples "as much as they were able"; in other words, to the extent that were able to perceive the glory of Christ - not fully.

We also understand why the disciples abandoned Christ while He was on the Cross and why they were afraid (Matth.26:56; Mark 14:50; John 20:19) and why they didn't immediately proclaim the Resurrection of Christ after He had revealed Himself to them.

The Apostles in actual fact recognized Christ, only after the Pentecost. Only then did they begin to preach, no longer feeling any fear towards the reactions of the Judeans and the Gentiles: with power and with authority.

6. Why are there atheists?

The Apostle James makes a basic discernment between the wisdom that "***descends from above***" and the "wisdom" which is characterized as "***earthly, sensual, demonic***" (James 3:15)

The one "***wisdom***" is the kind that is entirely disconnected from God; it is the one that does not result in the glorification of God but instead the glorification of man without God. That is why it is characterized as "***demonic***" (cmp. also, Genesis 3:4 onwards).

The other kind of "***wisdom***" is not attributed to man's effort, which is why it is kept hidden from the "***wise and the prudent***" of this world. It is revealed only to the "***infants***" (Matth.11:25; Luke 10:21) - to "***the foolish ones of the world***", the "***base ones***" and the "***weak ones***", so that "***no flesh should glory in His presence***". (1 Cor.1:27-29)

All that we have mentioned here assists us to explain why so many people find difficulty in confessing the dogmas of our Church. The reason is because they rely exclusively on their own powers and seek something that they cannot "bear" with them alone. Because, as is evident, the things of God cannot be fully adapted to the potentials of human thought. God cannot possibly be known by man in the manner that man desires to know God.

"***Wisdom***" says the wise Solomon, is "***a puff of the power of God, and an emanation of the glory of the Almighty***"; it is a "***a reflection of eternal light and a spotless mirror of the activity of God and an image of his goodness***". (Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26 - Septuagint). .

"***Who has learned your counsel unless you gave wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?***" the same one asks again (Wisdom of Solomon 9:17 - Septuagint).

History presents numerous examples of people who were unsuccessful in their quest for God, because they relied on their own powers and on human potentials. Many philosophers before Christ as well as thinkers attempted to become acquainted with God through their logic. It was of course to be expected that they would fail. Then there are others, who ended up in a total denial of God and proclaimed that God doesn't exist, while others said that there is a "certain power", an "impersonal God" Who however does not enter into any personal relationship with mankind.

God is the way and the truth and life (John 14:6). He therefore cannot be afar; He cannot be an impersonal being that does not come into a relationship with man or show any interest for the world - as some assert. "***I am an approachable God says the Lord, and not a God far away***": I am the God Who is close to you; I am not a distant God, says the Lord through the mouth of the prophet. "***Do I not fill the sky and the earth?***" He adds. (Jeremiah 23:23-24; cmp. Matth.23:32; Mark 12:26)

Therefore God - man's savior - is not far away from him; He is close to him - within him. He is revealed inside the heart of man, by the Holy Spirit. (John 14:26; 1 John 2:20, 27)

For this to happen, man must admit his weakness, cleanse his heart with humility and repentance and ask for God to be revealed to him. If he does not do this, he is condemned to remain - without the life-giving Lord - as an atheist. But not all "atheists" belong to this category. Some people, who were engulfed in sin and carnal vices, had denied God because faith would have entailed consequences in their everyday behaviour (Proverbs 28:5, Psalms 13:1); whereas, by denying Him or by perceiving Him as distant - as a Being that is not concerned with man's life - then they would be able to quietly pursue their unruly lives without the risk of being checked for it.

The Lord "***is found, by those who do not test Him and He reveals Himself to those who do not disbelieve in Him***", says the Wisdom of Solomon.

"...***For crooked thoughts separate from God, and his power, when it is tested, convicts the foolish, because wisdom will not enter a soul that plots evil or reside in a body involved in sin. For a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit and depart from senseless thoughts and be ashamed when unrighteousness approaches.***" (Wisdom of Solomon 1:3-5 - Septuagint)

The knowledge of God, therefore, demands a cleanliness of heart and a purity in disposition. The wicked man - just like the devil, who is the personification of every wickedness and every temptation - can never attain the true knowledge of God, as much as he may search - even if he memorizes the content of the entire Holy Bible.

Characteristic of this point is the second temptation of Christ:

As we are informed by the evangelist, the evil spirit transports Christ to the edge of the topmost point of the Temple and says to Him:

"***If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ' He shall give His angels charge over you,' and,' In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone***." (Matth.4:6, Psalms 90:11).

Here, Satan's intention was not a pure one. Satan was not seeking any personal union with Christ - that is, the true one, theognosy. On the contrary, he sought to lure the Lord into an action that was wicked, as it was not an action of trust, love and obedience to the Will of the Father. It did not respond to the divine plan; instead, it was an attempt for His subservience to Satan's plan.

It was for this reason that the Lord replied as follows:

"***Again, it is written: You shall not tempt the Lord your God***." (Matth. 4:7, Luke 4:12, Deut.6:16. Cmp 1 Cor.10:9, Numb.21:5-6)

Thus, whoever does not begin with a pure disposition will never approach the divinity of the Lord and will not be able to become united with Him - as much as he may research, as much as he may study the Holy Bible.

"***My soul thirsted for the living God. When shall I come and appear to the face of God?***" (Psalms 42:2)

The one who will yearn for God with his soul and will run like a thirsty deer to the water springs (Psalms 42:1) - that is, to Christ (John 4:10, 14, 7:37) - he will receive the "***living water***" (John 4:10). The one who will try to quench his thirst on his own, will never achieve it.

"***I shall give to the one who thirsts, from the spring of the water of life, for free***" (Revel.21:6)

"And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely"(Revel.22:17; cmp.Isaiah 55,1).

Chapter 3 - The Divine Energies

1. Ignorance of the essence of God

The Apostle Peter writes in his second epistle that:

"***....His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him, Who has called us by His glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"***. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

This last phrase of the Apostle of course does not imply that man can possibly come to know the essence of God - that is, that which characterizes the divine existence and separates it from the created creations. And this is because, if man were capable of entering the divine nature, then he himself would become God; in which case, we would not have just one but many gods. "***You will not be able to see My face***" says God to Moses, "***because it is not possible for man to look upon My face and live.***" (Exod.33:20; cmp. 1 Tim.6:16)

2. Knowledge of the divine energies

Nevertheless, the words of the Holy Bible are explicit; God's promise is that He will render mankind "a communicant of divine nature" - partakers of the divine life.

So, how is this possible, if God's nature is inapproachable by man?

The answer is provided by the Fathers of the Church, when they discern between the Divine Essence and the Divine Energies. Man -they assert- cannot possibly become acquainted with the essence of God. However, it is possible for him to become acquainted with His Divine Energies, which are inseparable from His Essence. At this point, the Fathers use the example of the sun's rays and say that even though the sunrays are inseparable from the sun, they nevertheless are perceptible and they act beyond the sun.

"The divine energies of God" says Basil the Great, "descend upon us. His Essence however remains unapproachable". In this way, God is present in His divine energies, which constitute the revealing of the divine nature. God therefore reveals Himself to people through His divine energies and He invites them to become "communants of divine nature". Not participants of the Divine Essence, but the uncreated divine energies, which are inseparable from the Divine Essence.

The glory of the Trinitarian God, which reveals itself with the Uncreated divine light within Creation and in the life of people, renders the Saints of our Church participants of the divine glory.

We will have the opportunity to refer more extensively on this subject, when we speak about the divine glory that fills God's new creation: that is, the life of the Church and of the Saints of the Church and acts through the precious Cross, the sacred icons, the venerable relics, sanctification and generally speaking, through all the sanctified things of our Church. For this reason, we shall confine ourselves here to only these few things, without further fortifying them with the Holy Bible.

3. The eternicity of the divine energies

It is obvious that the expression of the Divine Essence through divine powers and energies is not at all dependent on the existence or not of the world. The world has absolutely nothing to do with this event. It is for this reason that we say the divine energies are uncreated and eternal - just as the glory of the Trinitarian God is likewise uncreated and eternal.

It is in this way that we comprehend why the creation of the world (which is the result of those divine energies), as well as all the other events of God's presence within the world and through those divine energies, do not impose any change in the divine life; they are the result of God's love, which, like all divine powers, comprise the manifestation of God's essence.

God remains unaltered - that is, without any "variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17; cmp. Psalms 101:28) but His glory fills and vivifies man and Creation overall.

4. God's traces in Creation

With the uncreated energies that are made manifest in the world and leave their imprint in Creation, man - who studies those creations - is able to perceive the presence of God; in other words, he can discover the glory of God within Creation itself.

The Apostle Paul says: "***because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse***..." (Romans 1:19-20)

The Prophet Habakkuk cries out: "***...His virtue has covered heavens, and the earth is full of his praise. 4 And his brightness will be like light; horns are in his hands. And he has established a strong love of his strength.*** (Habbakuk 3:4; cmp. Numbers 14:21)

This same truth is also proclaimed by the Psalmist:

"The heavens are telling of divine glory,
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day spews forth utterance,and night to night proclaims knowledge. There are no conversations, nor are there words,the articulations of which are not heard. Their sound went out to all the earth,and to the ends of the world their utterances. [...] The law of the Lord is faultless, turning souls; the testimony of the Lord is reliable, making infants wise; the statutes of the Lord are upright, making glad the heart; the commandment of the Lord is radiant, enlightening the eyes..." (Psalms 19:1-4, 7-8. Cmp. Wisdom of Solomon 13:3-9, Wisdom of Sirah 43:11-33).

Here, it is not only about an external witness of God's presence in the world, but mainly about the encounter of the divine energies of God in the heart of man; about the union of man with the uncreated Divine Energies, which are the result of divine grace inside man.

Therefore, that which is revealed to man through Creation is the glory of God - the love and the wisdom of God - the rays of divine glory which emanate and vivify all of Creation.

When man perceives these life-giving rays of divine love, he senses the presence of God Who emanates the divine powers, he becomes united with the Divine Energies of God - in other words, he becomes a vessel of God's grace, a communicant of the divine nature and a "***partaker of God's holiness***" (Hebr. 12:10; 2 Peter 1:4).

Chapter 4 - Who is the God of Revelation?

1. The hospitality of Abraham

Man cannot possibly know God the way He is in reality. That is, he cannot become acquainted with the essence of God. He can only perceive the uncreated energies of God - the "traces" of God.

However, in the Holy Bible and the Sacred Tradition of the Church, we have certain "portrayals" of God. The most familiar one is that Byzantine icon in which God is portrayed in the form of three angels - the way He appeared before Abraham. The Fathers of the Church say that the excerpt in question actually comprises the very first depiction of the Holy Trinity in the Old Testament.

"***Now God appeared to him near the oak of Mambre, while he was sitting at the door of his tent at midday. And looking up with his eyes he saw, and behold, three men stood over him. And when he saw them, he ran forward from his tent door to meet them and did obeisance upon the ground and said, "Lord, if perchance I have found favor before you, do not pass by your servant. Do let water be taken, and let them wash your feet, and you refresh yourselves under the tree'***." (Gen.18:1-4)

What surprises us here, is that although the number of visitors is three, Abraham addresses Them as though They are one! Then, he again addresses Them in the plural.

Then in the same excerpt, we notice something amazing: Abraham's interlocutor (in the Septuagint Greek text, which is used by our Church and used by the Apostles themselves during the compilation of the New Testament), He is characterized with the word "Lord" (Κύριος), whereas the Hebrew text uses the word יְהוָה "Yahwe" - in other words, "God" (Genesis 18:16-23):

טז וַיָּקֻמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים, וַיַּשְׁקִפוּ עַל-פְּנֵי סְדֹם; וְאַבְרָהָם--הֹלֵךְ עִמָּם, לְשַׁלְּחָם.	16 And when the **men** had set out from there, **they** looked down upon the face of Sodoma and Gomorra, and Abraam was going along with **them** as he joined in escorting **them**.
יז וַיהוָה, אָמָר: הַמְכַסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה.	**17** And the **LORD** said: 'Surely I shall not hide from my servant Abraam what **I** am about to do?
יח וְאַבְרָהָם--הָיוֹ יִהְיֶה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל, וְעָצוּם; וְנִבְרְכוּ-בוֹ--כֹּל, גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ.	**18** As for Abraam, he shall come to be a great and populous nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.

יט כִּי יְדַעְתִּיו, לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יְצַוֶּה אֶת-בָּנָיו וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו, וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה, לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט--לְמַעַן, הָבִיא יְהוָה עַל-אַבְרָהָם, אֵת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר, עָלָיו.

19 For **I** knew that He will instruct his sons and his household after him, and they will keep the ways of the **LORD** , by doing righteousness and justice so that the **LORD** may bring upon Abraam all the things that **He** has talked about to him.'

כ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה, זַעֲקַת סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה כִּי-רָבָּה; וְחַטָּאתָם--כִּי כָבְדָה, מְאֹד.

20 And the **LORD** said: 'Verily, the outcry concerning Sodom and Gomorrah has been increased, and their sins are very great!

כא אֵרְדָה-נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה, הַכְּצַעֲקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עָשׂוּ כְלָה; וְאִם-לֹא, אֵדָעָה.

21 So when **I** go down **I** shall see whether they are perpetrating according to the outcry concerning them that is coming to **Me**, but if not—that **I** may know...'

כב וַיִּפְנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים, וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה; וְאַבְרָהָם--עוֹדֶנּוּ עֹמֵד, לִפְנֵי יְהוָה.

22 And after the **men** had turned away from there and went to Sodom; but Abraam was still standing before the **LORD**.

כג וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם, וַיֹּאמַר: הַאַף תִּסְפֶּה, צַדִּיק עִם-רָשָׁע.

23 Then when Abraam had come near, he said, “Surely you will not destroy the righteous with the ungodly, and the righteous will be as the ungodly?

This event, therefore, of Abraham's hospitality at the Oak of Mambre, is characterized by the Fathers of our Church as the first portrayal of the Holy Trinity.

2. The Holy Trinity revealed in the New Testament

In the era of the New Testament, God is revealed in a very clear manner: it was at the River Jordan - on the day that Christ condescended to be baptized by John. The One Whom man could not possibly have perceived with his own faculties: the One, Trinitarian God: The **Father**, Who testifies about the divinity of the Son and announces Him as 'His beloved Son'; the **Son**, Who was being baptized in the Jordan and Who illuminates the whole world, ridding it of the domination of Satan, and the **Holy Spirit**, Who descends in the likeness of a dove and confirms the witness of the Father and Who provides for us the unshakeable foundation of our faith. (Matth.3:13-17)

This great truth is confirmed by the hymn of our Church:

"While being baptized in the Jordan, o Lord,
the veneration of the Trinity was made manifest:
for, the voice of the Begetter testified of You,
naming You as the beloved Son;
and the Spirit, in the likeness of a dove,
confirmed the inerrancy of those words.
O manifest Christ, our God,
Who also illumined the world:
glory be to You"

This divine revelation is also confirmed by the testimony of John:

" ***I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God***" (John 1:33-34)

But in the New Testament we have other revelations also, of this ineffable mystery. It is the witness of the event on Mount Tabor: the Transfiguration of the Saviour (Matth.17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36)

The three disciples there had witnessed the radiance of the divine Person, while the Holy Spirit shrouded them with the glowing cloud and the Father was again confirming that "this is My beloved Son; it is Him that you should listen to".

Our faith, therefore, is not supported on the unstable and full of imperfections human logic. It is the result of a divine epiphany and is supported by the Uncreated divine light of Mount Tabor, and the certainty given by the presence of the Holy Spirit, Who again descended with a rushing noise "as though a strong wind blowing", as on the day of the Pentecost, in order to "replete" the disciples (Acts 2:2-4) and remain in the Church, in order to guide God's people to the truth (14:16, 16:13).

These are the unshakeable foundations of our faith, which secure a stability that exceeds every other certainty that is based on human arguments and facts: The witness of God the Father and the manifestation of the Son's glory. The descent of the Holy Spirit in the likeness of a dove and like tongues of flames.

It was for this reason that the Apostle Peter wrote the following to the Christians:

"***For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.***
And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:16-21).

And another disciple - John - adds:

"***If we accept the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God in which He testified about His Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God, has the witness in himself; but whoever does not believe in God, has made Him a liar, because he did not believe the testimony that God gave about the Son.***" (1 John 5:9-10)

3. Other witnessing in the Holy Bible

Apart from the aforementioned excerpts, the Holy Bible mentions the Holy Trinity in other places as well.

They are the passages of the Old Testament in which God speaks in the plural (Gen.1:26. 3:22, 11:7) There is also the angelic hymn, in which the word "holy" is repeated three times (Isaiah 6:3) and elsewhere.

When Christ sent forth His disciples, He gave them the command to baptize those who accepted the message of the gospel, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matth.28:19)

The incarnated Son and Logos of God, the Christ, clearly discerned Himself from the Father and the Holy Spirit.

"***How, therefore, do the scribes say that Christ is the Son of David? For David himself had said in the Holy Spirit: 'Sayeth the Lord to my Lord, 'sit Thou at My right-hand***...'." (Psalms 110:1) "***David, therefore, himself calls Him 'Lord'. How can He therefore be his Son?***..." (Mark 12:35-36)

The "Lord" who speaks is the Father. The "Lord" to whom He is referring is the Son. And He who is inspiring David to utter that prophetic phrase is the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul concludes his second epistle to the Corinthians with the Trinitarian blessing: "***May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all***" (2 Cor.13:13, cmp. 1:21-22 and Titus 3:4-6)

But all these testimonies of the Holy Bible - as well as others which we haven't mentioned - are properly comprehended and are accepted, only as gifts of God, as the fruits of the Holy Spirit and divine energies in the hearts of the people. (1 Cor. 2:4-16; 1 John 2:20, 27)

4. The need for the divine "noise"

Even though the foundations of our faith in the One, Trinitarian God are unshakeable because they are founded on the Word/Logos of God and not on the instability of human logic, there are people who did not arrive at the Trinitarian truth, but instead remained in delusion and in heretical cacodoxy - albeit asserting that they study the Holy Bible. They study it with their own powers only, without invoking the help of the Holy Spirit, Who "***leads to the truth***" (John 16:13, 14:26). They don't invoke the assistance of the Paraclete (Consoler), because "the Spirit of the Consoler/Paraclete, Who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son" (hymn of the Holy Spirit) acts only in the name of Christ (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13-15) - that is, in regard to His Holy Body, the Church (Colos.1:18-24, Ephes.1:23)

Whoever does not have Christ has remained in the age of the Old Testament, and a "veil" hinders him from understanding the Holy Bible. The Apostle Paul characteristically says to the Corinthians:

"....***for until this day, that same veil remains unlifted during the reading of the Old Testament, not yet discovered that it is abolished in Christ; but even to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies upon their heart. Nevertheless, if that person returns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. The Lord is the Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there liberty is. We all, with unveiled face, reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord, the Spirit***." (2 Cor. 3:14-18)

For the people therefore of Christ, the "veil" that hinders the true comprehension of the Holy Bible and especially the Old Testament, is abolished. The "Lord" - the Spirit of Truth - grants them the true freedom and renders them able to face the radiance of God. For those who do not have Christ - that is, for those who are far from the Church - that "veil" remains, and they cannot properly comprehend the Scriptures. Thus, in order to reach the truth of the Trinitarian God, studying the Holy Bible is not enough. We need to become people of Christ - that is, members of the Church wherein the Holy Spirit of God is active - and await that divine "noise". That is when we will feel the presence of the fiery tongues and receive divine illumination, just like the Apostles on the day of the Pentecost. Without that divine breath, no man can get to know the great truth of the Trinitarian God, regardless if he studies the Holy Bible - even if he memorizes it entirely by heart. "For us to become fully acquainted with the mystery of the Holy Trinity" says Evagrios of Pontus, "means to attain a perfect union with God - to enter into the divine life".

5. The dogmatic clauses of our Church

Saint Hilarion says that for us Orthodox, "it should suffice for us to fulfil everything that has been decreed, solely with faith: that is, to worship the Father, to honour the Son together with Him, and to be replete with the Holy Spirit."

But, as he further mentions, there is also the "malice of the heretics and the blasphemers". As such, "we are forced to match our humble word to the most ineffable of mysteries"; "to climb unreachable heights, to speak of ineffable things... to expose the mysteries to chance, with the human tongue, instead of enclosing them inside the worship of our soul."

That is the reason the Church made sure that She expresses more analytically the faith in the Holy Trinity and protect Her members form the dangers of heresy and cacodoxy, the results of which lead to perdition.

6. One essence and three hypostases

Our Church teaches us that the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are united in an inseparable bond and that simultaneously they each are discernible between each other. The three Persons or three Hypostases of the Holy Trinity - says John of Damascus - are "the one within the other" (εν αλλήλαις)"; however, they are not confused between themselves.

In the Holy Trinity there is a sole and unique principal and a sole and unique source: that is, the Father. He shares His own divine nature with the Son and the Holy Spirit - that is, the one and unique nature of godhood.

One, therefore, is the nature of the Holy Trinity, and one is the principal and the source that imparts that nature: the Father.

However, that which is different is the manner of existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit out of that one source, the Father: The Father begets the Son and the Holy Spirit proceeds from him. Consequently, the Son exists in a different manner with regard to the Father (He is begotten by Him) and the Spirit also differently (He proceeds from Him).

From the above, we can understand that there is a difference in the form of their relationship towards the common source - the Father - by the Son and the Holy Spirit. Exactly what that difference (begetting, procession) constitutes remains something entirely unknown to us.

The Orthodox teaching therefore regarding the Holy Trinity is precisely about the preservation of the perfect union (the one essence) and the distinguishing between the three hypostases. This distinguishing is based on the manner of the pre-eternal existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit (begetting and procession) as ordained by God the Father.

7. The procession of the Holy Spirit

According to the Orthodox faith, therefore, the only source from which the Son is begotten and from which the Holy Spirit proceeds is the Father.

But this truth is not safeguarded in the Orthodox manner in the Roman Catholic church, which has added to the Creed the term "Filioque" - that is, that the Holy Spirit proceeds ALSO from the Son. The reason is that this viewpoint of the Roman Catholic church does not preserve the unity of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, thus risking the introduction of diarchy - that is, of two principals (the Father AND the Son), or even a difference in the essence and not in the manner of imparting the one, common Divine Essence. It is furthermore obvious that in this case, the risk implies dual deism.

This is the precise danger that the Orthodox Church averts, by proclaiming the distinguishing factor between the three Persons; that is: the manner of imparting the single Divine Essence on the part of the Father. This is the way that the discerning of the three hypostases and the unity of the one essence of God are also preserved in Orthodox teaching.

This faith by the Orthodox Church in the monarchy of the Father, in regard to the pre-eternal imparting of the Divine Essence to the Son (by the pre-eternal begetting) and to the Holy Spirit (by the pre-eternal procession) should not be confused with the "sending forth" of the Paraclete (Consoler) within Time by the Lord, for the illumination and the salvation of the world.

"***But when the Consoler is come, Whom I shall send unto you from the Father - the Spirit of Truth Who proceeds from the Father - He shall testify of Me.***.." (John 15:26)

And elsewhere, he mentions that "...***the Consoler - the Holy Spirit - Whom the Father will send in My Name"*** (that is, in the name of Jesus Christ)... (John 14:26)

Justifiably, then, do we Orthodox faithful cry out to the Holy Spirit the hymn of the Pentecost:

"O Thou Most Holy Spirit,
Who has proceeded from the Father
and through the Son
has remained within
the illiterate disciples"

("O Most Holy Spirit, You, Who have proceeded from within the Father and have alighted - through the Son - upon the illiterate disciples - save us and sanctify all of us who have acknowledged You as God!")

Our Church confesses the whole Orthodox faith in the One, Trinitarian God, with Her superb hymn on the Pentecost:

"Come, you nations, let us worship the thrice-hypostatized Godhood: the Son in the Father, together with the Holy Spirit. For the Father has timelessly begotten the Son - eternal and co-enthroned - and the Holy Spirit Who was forever in the Father, glorified along with the Son, as one power, one essence, one Godhood, worshipping which, we all say:

'**Holy is God**', Who created everything through the Son, with the collaboration of the Holy Spirit;

'**Powerful is God**', through Whom we have come to know the Father and the Holy Spirit Who came to the world;

'**Immortal is God**' - the Holy Spirit - Who proceeds from the Father and reposes in the Son.

'**Holy Trinity, glory to You**.'

God's redemptive opus - divine providence - is fulfilled in the Person of the Son, "in the Holy Spirit", But, the principal and the source of salvation is always God the Father.

"For, as many as the promises of God are", says the Apostle characteristically, they are all realized in the Person of Christ. "***In Him is the 'yes' and in Him is the 'Amen', for the glorification of God by us. For, the One Who assures us, Who is with us in Christ, and Who has anointed us, is God; and Who has also sealed us and has given us the betrothal of the Spirit in our hearts.***" (2 Cor.1:20-22. Cmp. Titus 3:4-6).

8. Love, as the revealing of the life of the Trinitarian God

Of all that has been mentioned about the procession of the Holy Spirit by ONLY the Father, the following question can be posed:

Is this dogma indeed so basic for our salvation, that all the struggles made by Orthodoxy to preserve it are justified?

We are aware from the Holy Bible that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16); consequently, love undoubtedly constitutes a revealing of God's way of life. Thus, God is love, because He is not a unit, nor is He a dyad; He is a Triad. If God were a solitary unit, love would not have been an expression of God's essence. Because, how can a being that exists in solitude be "love"? Then again, if God were a dyad - that is, Father and Son only - again, we would not have union and love in their fullness; rather, we would have a kind of opposition: Father-Son. Well, that opposition is eternally overcome, in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

This is how we come to understand why the Holy Trinity has nothing to do with numeric arithmetic: it denotes the transcending of the ego, the transcending of division, and the fullness of union, harmony and love.

"The characteristic of love", says Bishop Nicholas of Ohrid, "is that the Person who loves, wants to disappear into the person being loved. That is how ardent the Father's love towards the Son is, and the Son's love towards the Father! Just as ardent is the love of the Holy Spirit towards the Father and the Son. "It is with that kind of kenotic ("self-emptying") love - that is, with a love that keeps nothing for itself", he continues, "that the words of the Lord are interpreted, when He said that '...My Father is greater than me' (John 14:28). With that kind of love, the Holy Trinity can neither be confused, nor divided. It is, and it remains, one and simultaneously a threefold flame of life and love. In this wondrous flame of the Trinitarian God's love, we also light our own little candles of terrestrial love, which can easily be extinguished. When love is concentrated in one person - that is, in our self - it is not love, it is self-love and egotism. Love between two quickly cools and turns into sorrow. This is the reason that childlessness in the Old Testament was looked upon as a curse. The fullness of love is love of three. That is the way it is on earth, because that is the way it is in heaven."

9. The Trinitarian God as man's only hope.

The above words by the Bishop of Ohrid come to remind us of a basic teaching of our Church: that man was fashioned by God according to His image ("in the image of") and that the destination given to man is to resemble Him ("in the likeness of").

Thus, man discovers the purpose and the fullness of his life, when he becomes a living image of God; when his life becomes a miniature replica of God's life. That is why he must know that God is Trinitarian - that God lives "triadically" - ie., a life of complete unity and complete love.

If man becomes aware that this is his model - in other words, that he is in the image of the Holy Trinity - then he will believe that it is possible for him to likewise live a life of union and love. Then he will be able to find salvation.

This is not difficult to perceive, when we stop to think that man - especially in our day - lives internally splintered and externally isolated. He feels this loneliness and isolation very deeply. He feels as though he consists of multiple elements. He has a body, a spirit, will, sentiments etc...

A man who is internally divided can never say that he is redeemed. The same applies, when he feels he is living in total isolation and loneliness. A person who doesn't possess the potential to love cannot find his inner balance.

But, when the person realizes that inner splintering and isolation do not belong to his nature, only unity, then, when he is informed that he is in the image of the Trinitarian God Who lives in fullness, in unity and in love, he will believe that he too is able to attain it: that he too is created for that same thing, and that is the point where his final destination lies.

Behold, therefore, why man's only salvation is the truth of the Trinitarian God - the faith in the Holy Trinity.

Chapter 5 - The Opus of the Trinitarian God

1. An opus of uncreated divine energies

As mentioned, there are no temporal or other changes in the life of the Trinitarian God (James 1:17, Psalms 101:28). The innermost life of the divine Person/Hypostasis - the Divine Essence - knows no Past or Future; only an eternal Present.

For this reason, when we refer to the opus of God within Time, we are not implying that Creation is a direct opus of God's essence. In short, Creation on the part of the Trinitarian God, within Time, is not the result of the Divine Essence. It is the fruit of God's uncreated energies.

Characteristically, the Prophet Jeremiah mentions that "...***it is the Lord, Who created the earth by His strength; Who set upright the world by His wisdom, and by His prudence stretched out the sky***." (Jeremiah 10:12, 28:15; Hebr.51:15).

2. The Trinitarian figure of Creation

According to the Orthodox Faith, the creation of the entire world was the work of the Father. However, the other two Persons also participate in this praxis of creation: the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"***All that the Lord wanted He did, in the sky and on the earth, in the seas and in all the abysses***" says the Psalmist (Psalms,134:6)

"***...Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, for by Him was everything created: in the heavens and upon the earth, the visible and the invisible... All things were created through Him and for Him... and He is, even before all things, and all things consist in Him."*** (Colos.1:15-17). Everything, therefore, "***was created through Him***" - that is, through the Son and Logos of God, and "***without Him, nothing would be created of those things that were made***" (John 1:3, cmp. 1 Cor. 8:6)

The Holy Bible furthermore says that during Creation, the Holy Spirit was borne "***above the waters***" (Genesis 1:2). That same Divine Spirit continues to "fulfil" the Trinitarian God's entire Creation (Wisdom of Solomon 1:7) and is found "***in everything***" (Wisdom of Solomon 12:1).

"***You have fashioned me and have placed me under Your hand***" says the Psalmist very characteristically.

"***Where could I go, away from Your Spirit? And from Your countenance where could I flee? Even if I ascend to the sky, You are there; and even if I descend to Hades, You are also there***." (Psalms 138:7-8, Jerem.23,24).

If we wished to use a form that reflects the Orthodox teaching of the Holy Trinity, then, along with the Fathers of our Churcn, we could say that the entire world was created "***by the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit***"; or, as the hymn of our Church says: "***by the Father, through the Son, in collaboration with the Holy Spirit***".

The One -therefore- and Trinitarian God is the Creator of all things: of the spiritual world, the material world, the flora and the fauna, of mankind, of the universe.

3. Creation from nil

For the Trinitarian God to create the universe, He had no need of any "raw material". He created everything from nil. This is clearly taught by the Holy Bible:

"***I implore you***" says the mother of the Maccabees to her youngest son, prior to his martyred death, "***to look upon the heaven and the earth, and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not create them out of things that existed. And in the same way did the human race come into being***." (2 Macab.7:28, also Rom.4:17, Hebr. 11:3)

This basic faith of our Church is also proclaimed in the first Book of the Old Testament. Naturally, in there have been used various phrases and expressions from the life of the people of that era, who had to comprehend the immense truth that was hiding behind that narration. The reason for this, as we know, was and is the purpose of the Old Testament: to teach the truth to the people of this earth; to speak to them with words that they can understand. (Genes.1:1-31)

4. The Holy Angels

Prior to the material world, the Trinitarian God had created the Holy Angels. "***When the stars were born, all My angels glorified Me with a loud voice***", as mentioned in the Book of Job (Job 38:7, cmp. Psalms 148:2-5)

Chapter 6 - The Image of the Trinitarian God

1. The image and the prototype

«***Then God said, "Let us make humankind according to Our image and according to likeness, and let them*** (man and woman) ***rule the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and the cattle and all the earth and all the creeping things that creep upon the earth." And God made humankind; according to divine image He made it; male and female He made them.*** » ***(Gen.1:26-27. Cmp Gen.5:1, 9:6, Wisd.Solomon 2:23)***

Man, therefore, was created according to the image of the Trinitarian God ("in the image of"). This means that in order to actually know what man is - in his own nature - we need to know about God Himself, Who is man's prototype. This signifies that man is not the prototype; he is an image of the prototype.

The more that man delves into the life of the Trinitarian God and the more he responds with his life to the life of the Holy Trinity, the more he will respond better to his human nature, which is an image of God.

In the opposite case, when we are at a distance from God, we do not live according to our nature, but instead, contrary to it. That is what "man's fall" is: the deterioration of God's image - the death of man.

«But even if you say to me: 'show me your God', I will also say to you: ' show me your man and I will show you my God', said Saint Theophilos to the idolater Autolykos.

As another Abba of the "Gerontikon"**(*)** adds: «if you have seen your brother, you have seen your God».

2. The image of the Omniscient and Omnipotent God

Man is an image of the Trinitarian God. This means that deep down inside him, within the image of God, he can sense and discern the presence of God Himself. In this way, man hides within him immense potentials. and his place within Creation is unique.

The narration of the Old Testament underlines this truth. It presents God as calling upon man to become the centre of all of Creation; the master of nature, of plants, of animals, of the universe (Gen.1:28-30, 9:1-2):

«***And God blessed them, saying, "Increase, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and all the cattle and all the earth and all the creeping things that creep upon the earth....."*** »

«***And God blessed Noe and his sons and said to them, "Increase, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it. And the trembling and fear of you shall be on all the animals of the earth and on all the birds of the sky and on all the things that move on the earth and on all the fish of the sea; I have given them under authority to you..."*** »

Also:

«***He gave them days in number and a fixed time, and He gave them authority over the things upon it. He clothed them in a strength like Himself, and in His image He made them. He placed the fear of Him upon all flesh, even to have dominion over beasts and birds*** » (Wisdom of Sirach, 17:2-4. Cmp. Wisdom of Solomon 10:2)

This dominance of man does not merely relate to creations catering to their needs, but also to a more spiritual level. Man receives an instruction from God: to give to each animal - that is, to each of God's creations - a suitable name:

«***And out of the earth God furthermore formed all the animals of the field and all the birds of the sky and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them, and anything, whatever Adam called it as living creature, this was its name. And Adam gave names to all the cattle and to all the birds of the sky and to all the animals of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper like him.***» (Gen. 2:19-20).

This action does not constitute a simple and insignificant episode. For one to give a certain animal or thing its name, signified to the Jews a definition of the purpose to which he is called, to fulfil it within the harmony of the world. With this instruction, therefore, God calls upon man to determine the particular purpose of each animal, by giving it an appropriate name. In other words, he was called upon to continue the work of God's Creation - to become a co-creator in a world that was "very good"; that is, full of beauty and harmony.

3. And He gave to mankind science

All of the above reveal that man - as the image of the all-wise and omniscient God - received tremendous potentials to develop civilization and science in every field.

For example, in order for man to give a suitable name that would reflect the particular characteristics of each animal, he had to previously develop all those abilities that God had given him for obtaining a true knowledge of those animals. After all, that was God's instruction, when He led the animals before Adam «***to see what he would call them***» (Gen. 2:19).

The deep knowledge of the wonders of God's Creation is also presupposed by God's other commandment, to fill the earth: «***and subdue it...***» (Gen.1:28. Cmp.also Wisdom of Sirach 17:2-4. Wisdom of Solomon 10:2).

This authority of man, and his dominant place opposite the rest of Creation, was placed inside the full beauty and harmony of the world (Genesis 1:31), and not outside it. That is, it had to be exercised not only in accordance with the particular characteristics of each creation, but also in harmony with the the will of God (cmp. Gen. 3:3). It is also obvious that the fulfilment of this instruction by God presupposes scientific research and a deep knowledge of creations.

Knowledge and science therefore fully respond to God's creative plan. He is the One «***Who teaches man knowledge***» (Psalms 93:10). «***And it was He that gave skill to human beings in order to be glorified in His marvelous deeds***» (Wisdom of Sirach 38:6).

It is for this reason that man is "blessed": «***Happy is the person who has found wisdom, and the mortal who perceived prudence***» (Proverbs 3:13).

«***Listen to me, child,*** (says the wise Sirach) ***and learn knowledge, and to my words apply your heart. I will disclose instruction by fixed standard, and with accuracy I will declare knowledge***. » (Wisdom of Sirach 16:24-25)

Faith, therefore, not only does not go contrary to scientific progress; it actually places theological and anthropological prerequisites for unlimited human research and human science.

Man should utilize all his potentials in order to improve the conditions of his life. Indeed, during the course of human history we see him discover tools, with which he treats wood, stone, iron, the metals; we see him subjugating steam, electricity, atomic power, constructing factories, eliminating distances.

This is a truth that we today are able to perceive even more than previous generations, because we are living in an era of human science and techniques.

Many people wonder in our day and age just how much man's arrival on the Moon has shaken his faith in the Holy Bible. The answer to this question can be found in one of David's Psalms:

«***O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is Your name in all the earth, because Your magnificence was raised beyond the heavens. Out of mouths of infants and nurslings You furnished praise for Yourself, for the sake of Your enemies, to put down enemy and avenger, because I will observe the heavens, works of Your fingers— moon and stars—things You alone founded. What is man, that You are mindful of him or son of man that You attend to him? You diminished him a little in comparison with angels; with glory and honor You crowned him. And You set him over the works of your hands; You subjected all under his feet, sheep and cattle, all together, and further the beasts of the plain, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea — the things that pass through paths of seas. O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is Your name in all the earth!***» (Psalms 8:1-10).

The Creator Himself has therefore crowned man with "glory and honour" and destined him to become the "master" of all "the works of His hands", to subdue "beneath his feet" not only the earth, but all of Creation, "the heavens, the moon and the stars".

4. The image of the God of love

Man's authority in the potentials and the powers of the world were not arbitrary ones; as such, man could not possibly exercise that authority in a selfish manner. It was an authority that pertained to a responsibility for God's entire Creation.

«***And the Lord God planted an orchard in Edem toward the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed [...] And the Lord God took the man whom He had formed and put him in the orchard to till and keep it***.» (Gen. 2:8-15).

Man's role in Paradise was a creative one, not an arbitrary and destructive one. He had to be a faithful and caring guard and protector of God's entire Creation.

Furthermore, the usage of the world on the part of man was not in a selfish manner, but always in accordance with the will of the Creator. This is made clear in God's commandment:

«***...“You shall eat for food of every tree that is in the orchard, but of the tree for knowing good and evil, of it you shall not eat; on the day that you eat of it, you shall die by death"***.»(Gen. 2:16-17. cmp. Romans 6:23).

In Paradise there were no differences between the thoughts and decisions of man or the deliberations and the actions of man and the will of God. Without any coercion, man related his own will to God's will, and he let God be the centre of his life. This was very natural for man in Paradise, as he was created in accordance with the image of the Trinitarian God and he lived a life according to his prototype - that is, a life that was in accordance with the life of the Holy Trinity: a life of inner unity, love and harmony - with himself, with his fellow-man, with the rest of Creation.

The centre of this unity was always God, to Whom man voluntarily offered himself, his achievements and all of Creation. Thus, everything was harmoniously united; everything was "very good".

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(*) Gerontikon: The Gerontikon is comprised of short texts usually describing a certain event or delineating the teaching of an Elder, and are set out in alphabetical order, per the name of the Elder that they pertain to. As one maxim succeeds the other, the history of a locality's monasticism also unfolds; a history of everyday events, which are nothing more and nothing less than the narration of relations among the Elders, with their students, with their neighbouring monastic communities, with their visitors, with the world...

The Gerontikon took on the form that we recognize today, at the beginning of the 5th century. It was the age when the continuous barbarian invasions had wholly destroyed the communities of the Egyptian desert, forcing the Abbas who had survived to seek a place of solitude in Palestine and Sinai. The Gerontikon was complied, so that the tradition which had meantime been created not be lost. The opus was written in Greek, from the beginning, even though the Elders (who were poor farmers in their majority) spoke Coptic. However, a plethora of translations was promptly embarked on, thus denoting the importance of the opus.

What impresses the reader who comes in contact with the Gerontikon for the first time is the unadorned expression of its narrations: in them, you will not find any of the intricate rhetorical intertwining as in later hagiological texts. Redundant descriptions, pietism, pretexts, puritanism are altogether absent. The responses given by the Abbas to the customary request of "Say a word" are direct, explicit, clear, straightforward. Trenchant. **Their teachings almost never pertain to dogmatic or other theoretical issues**. They only speak of practical issues; of the soul, of their everyday lives, of the temptations they encounter, and of their passions. Being fully aware of the complexity and the uniqueness of each person, **they avoid setting down general rules - instead, they always opine according to each case**. It is not unusual for one Elder to say entirely different things than another; their intention and their goal is the element that they have in common. But it is because of this diversity that one is enabled to find that which pertains to him personally.

Chapter 7 - The Fall

1. The fall of the demons

God's creations were discerned for their inner unity and harmony. The divine love was the life-giving force for the entire world.

But man did not remain faithful to that communion with the divine love and sought to emancipate himself from his Creator.

However, even before man's Fall, another fall had taken place among the angels which had been created prior to the visible world.

«***How is fallen from heaven the Day Star, which used to rise early in the morning!*** » asks the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 14:12) and he replies that this was on account of his excessive vanity :

He said to himself: «***13*** "***I will ascend to heaven; I will set my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on a lofty mountain, upon the lofty mountains toward the north; 14 I will ascend above the clouds; I will be like the Most High." 15 But now you will descend into Hades and into the foundations of the earth!***"» (Isaiah 14:13-15).

The Lord Himself mentioned to His disciples: « "***I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven***"» (Luke 10,18).

2. Temptation on the part of the devil

Satan was not innocent of man's Fall. The Old Testament narrates the incident, with the following words:

«...***And the snake said to the woman, "Why is it that God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree that is in the orchard'?" And the woman said to the snake, "We shall eat of the fruit of the tree of the orchard, but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the orchard, God said, 'You shall not eat of it nor shall you even touch it, lest you die.' " And the snake said to the woman, "You will not die by death, for God knew that on the day you eat of it, your eyes would be opened, and you would be like gods knowing good and evil***."» (Gen. 3:1-5. cmp. Isaiah 14:14).

3. Revolting against God's love

This temptation by Satan would not have had destructive results if man had remained stable in his loving union with God. However, he fell into that temptation and sacrificed divine love for the sake of his personal pursuits.

In order to perceive the abyss in which man let himself fall into, it suffices to underline that he had preferred as a rule in his life - not the paternal advice of the God of love, but the words of the one who had defied God Himself:

«***And the woman*** (Eve) ***saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasing for the eyes to look at and it was beautiful to contemplate, and when she had taken of its fruit she ate, and she also gave***

some to her husband with her, and they ate. And the eyes of the two were opened, and they knew that they were naked...» (Gen.3:6-7).

God had rendered all of the fruits of Paradise at man's disposal (Gen.2:16); however, the fruit of one tree was not designated by God for that purpose. It was not offered as a gift to man by his Creator. (Gen.2:17)

Thus, when man ate of that fruit, he ate something that had not been blessed by God as sustenance. Consequently, this action by man was not an act of communion with God; in other words, it was not in accordance with man's nature - in accordance with the image of God. It was an act of selfishness - or, as it has been said - an act whereby sustenance was condemned to be in communion with itself only, and not with God.

With this disobedience of his, man did not use the material world in accordance with God's will; he did not make use of Creation but rather a misuse. And it was in this way that man's revolt against God's love was manifested.

4. Man's alienation

The results of that disobedience were horrendous for man. His action did not correspond to his true nature, because man, as an image of the Trinitarian God, was by nature love. Thus, this action of his towards God could not possibly be characterized as a mere disobedience, but as a lapsing from human nature per se - as an alienation of man.

Indeed, God was no longer man's prototype, his centre and his orientation. Having been carried away by the counsel of Satan, who is the father of division, man began to seek outside of God the centre of his actions and his entire life, and to see in God's creations a purpose outside of their Creator. In other words, he did not perceive that each thing that is excised from God has no worth whatsoever, nor has it any life within it; that everything that ceases to hunger for God dies. (cmp. John 6:58)

It was thus that man's works also fell into the status of deterioration, as they had lost their reference to God and consequently had lost their true meaning. «...***cursed is the earth in your labors***» said God to Adam (Gen. 3:17).

Prior to the Fall, when man was in communion with God's love, his life was a perpetual participation in the life of the Trinitarian God; a continuous course towards the deification of man within a full communion with God.

Following the Fall, man abandoned God's love, seeking deification (theosis) apart from God. The result was the opening of man's eyes, but in reality, it only made him see his own nakedness (Gen.3:7) into which his own falling away from God's love had led him (Gen.3:7)

«***I have lost the first-created beauty and my comeliness, and now I stand here, naked, and am disgraced***», as stated in a hymn of the Great Canon.

5. The fragmenting of mankind

From the moment of his Fall, a huge adventure began for mankind: following the disruption of the loving relationship with God, which held all of Creation in unity, everything contained in Creation was also disrupted.

Man became fragmented and turned into an egotistic being, no longer having God as his reference point. When a child is born, it causes pain to its mother, while the woman becomes entirely dependent on her man (Gen.3:16)

Worth noting at this point is Adam's excuse-giving; he blamed Eve and isolated his own responsibilities from her, as though she were something entirely foreign to him.

« "***The woman, whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate***." » (Gen. 3:12).

How different are these words, compared to what Adam had said when he first saw Eve, prior to the Fall:

« "***This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Wo-man, for out of her Man she was taken***."» (Gen.2:23).

The complete unity which dominated between humankind prior to the Fall - which was an image of the life of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity - was disrupted, so that Adam no longer recognized Eve as being the «***bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh***» (Gen.2:23, 3:12).

In fact, the alienation between humans later on even reached the point of fratricide. The dialogue between God and Cain is characteristic for our topic. When God asked Cain «***where is your brother Abel?*** », He intended -precisely- to point out the loss of brotherly unity and the destruction of the element of love. (Gen. 4:9) However, instead of coming to his senses and allowing his soul to re-live the tender union of brotherly love, Cain presented the absolute alienation from his brother as something natural and self-understood:

« "***I do not know; surely, I am not my brother's keeper?***" » (Gen. 4:9).

Something therefore far deeper had changed mankind after the Fall, so that the man saw his woman and his brother as something separate, as something entirely foreign, and hostile.

6. The fragmenting of Creation

With man's Fall, everything around him lost its cohesion and its true destination. Everything fell away from God's love, which gave them life. They lost their primeval beauty and ceased to be "very good". Everything entered the kingdom of corruption and death:

«***Then to Adam He said, [...] cursed is the earth in your labors; with pains you will eat it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall cause to grow up for you, [...] By the sweat of your face you will eat***

your bread until you return to the earth from which you were taken, for you are earth and to earth you will depart"» (Gen.3:17-19).

Chapter 8 - The Rectification

1. The Protevangelion (First Gospel)

As we have seen, the result of the fall was a differentiation in the very nature of man. Consequently, the legacy of fallen Adam was a ponderous one: the legacy of a sickly nature, of an old, decaying root whose fate was death and deterioration.

So, how could Adam's descendants - all of humankind - be saved?

To achieve salvation, a new "root" was necessary - the root of a new Adam, and not someone from the old Adamian root. There was need of a new patriarch, who would restore man's nature back to its union with God and would make man a participant once again in the life of God. This could not be achieved by mankind whose origin was from the old root, of Adam, which had condemned it to deterioration and death. (Wisdom of Solomon 2:23). Man's very nature had to be healed, so that by participating in that reborn nature, he would be able to re-connect once again with the source of his life - God - and live. (John 3:36, 14:6, 1 John 5:12, 20).

This could never be achieved by man on his own, no matter how much he tried. The determining step had to be by God Himself.

It is a fact, that God - Who loved His people with «***an everlasting love***» (Jeremiah 38:3, Hebrews 31:3), showed this love of His, even on the day of the fall:

«***And I will put enmity between you and between the woman and between your seed and between her seed; He will watch your head, and you will watch His heel***." » (Gen. 3:15)

I will place enmity between you and the woman; between your seed and her seed - that is, between your descendant and her descendant; He will crush your head and you will sting His heel...

The descendant of the woman, Who was to crush Satan and the works of Satan, shall become a new patriarch. Thus, whoever is descended from Him shall not find himself under the reign of deterioration and death.

2. Period of expectation

The entire history of the people of Israel is a foretaste and a foreshadowing of the coming of the woman's "offspring" (seed) - that is, Christ - and the new communion between God and mankind, i.e. the Church.

God institutes a covenant with Noah and his descendants (Gen.9:8-17) and He reassures Abraham that his barren wife Sarah will bear a son, whom God will make into a patriarch of many nations:

«***And I will bless her, and she shall become nations, and kings of nations shall be from her***…" » (Gen. 17,16).

It is noteworthy that later on, when Sarah asked that her handmaiden (Hagar)'s son be sent away, this request seemed «***harsh***» to Abraham (Gen.21:11). God then said to him:

«…. ***"Do not let the matter be hard in your sight on account of the child and on account of the slave-girl; whatever Sarah says to you, obey her voice, for in Isaac offspring shall be named for you"***» (Gen. 21:12).

The Apostle Paul refers to these prophecies in order to underline that they were realized in the Person of Christ.

« ***…For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh*** (like the son of the servant girl Hagar)***; these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise*** (as was the son of the barren Sarah) ***are counted as the seed***. (Romans 9:6-8, 4:1-25).

"Children of Abraham" are those who believe in the name of Christ (cmp. also, Galatians 3:7-9). Furthermore, when the Apostle referred to God's promise to Abraham He said: "In the instance of Abraham, promises were made to him and his descendant." He did not say "and his descendants" as though implying many, but only one:

«***Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one,"And to your Seed," who is Christ.*** (Galatians 3:16. cmp. Gen.12:7, 13:15-16, 15:4-6, 17:7-8, 22:18).

From the time therefore of Abraham mankind has been waiting for that "seed", through Whom all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed - that is, Christ. (Gen. 22:18, Acts 3:25-26).

That same promise was renewed by God, in the person of the Patriarch Isaac (Gen. 26:4, 24) and the Patriarch Jacob and in fact, in a manner very indicative of the Lord's opus:

When Jacob received his father's blessing and the wish that he might become the father of many nations (Gen.28:3-4), he departed for Harran of Mesopotamia. While in the area of Bethel, night fell, and he lay down to sleep. He then saw in his dream a ladder, standing on the earth and its uppermost end touching the sky. Angels of God ascended and descended it; at the top of that ladder, Jacob saw the Lord leaning on it and heard Him say:

«…"***I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; do not be afraid; as for the land which you are sleeping on, I will give it to you and to your offspring*** *(*seed*)****. And your offspring*** *(*seed*)* ***shall be like the sand of the earth, and it shall widen out to the sea and to the southwest and to the north and to the east, and all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. And see, I am with you, carefully guarding you in every way where you might go, and I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done all the things that I talked about to you***." »

And Jacob woke from his sleep and said:

« "***The Lord is in this place—yet I did not know it!***" »

And he was afraid and said:

« "***How awesome is this place! This is nothing other than a divine house, and this is the gate of heaven.***" » (Gen.28:12-17)

The «seed» therefore of the woman, which was to crush the serpent's head, would also be the «seed» of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That descendant would constitute the starting point of a blessing for the entire world, and, like a unique ladder, would link earth with heaven, and man with God, Who was at the top of that ladder and was "leaning" on it, thus confirming to Jacob that the expectation was justified.

That ground where God acts and upon which Jacob had laid down, is characterized as sacred. It constitutes a foreshadowing of the Church - man's true homeland - to which he is brought back by Christ. It is the "divine house of God and the gate of heaven", as Jacob himself cried out.

Indeed, the Lord certifies that «***a ruler shall not be wanting from*** (the tribe of) ***Judah and a leader from his thighs*** (offspring) ***until the things stored up for him come, and he is the expectation of nations.***(Gen. 49:10)

Even more specifically speaks the Prophet Isaiah, when referring to Jesse, Jacob's descendant:

«***And a rod shall come out of the root of Iessai, and a blossom shall come up out of his root. And the Spirit of God shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and godliness***» (Isaiah 11:1-2).

The Apostle Paul, who refers to this prophecy, says that it was fulfilled in the Person of Christ. (Romans 15:8-12).

«***...because a child was born for us, a son also given to us, whose sovereignty was upon his shoulder, and he is named Messenger of Great Counsel, for I will bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health to him. His sovereignty is great, and his peace has no boundary upon the throne of David and his kingdom, to make it prosper and to uphold it with righteousness and with judgment from this time onward and forevermore***. » (Isaiah 9,6).

The prophet does not omit to describe the Saviour's redemptive opus and man's redemption through His Blood, which He offered voluntarily for our sake:

«***He bears our sins and grieves for us, and we thought Him to be in pain and stricken by God, and in affliction; however He was injured for our sins, and was bruised for our iniquities; an education of peace for us*** (was) ***upon Him. By His bruising, we have been healed. All of us have strayed like sheep; man had strayed on his path, and*** (so) ***the Lord delivered Him unto our sins. And He, being abused, did not open His mouth; like a sheep to the slaughter He was led, and like a lamb before its shearer*** (He was) ***mute; thus did He not open His mouth and the Lord wants to cleanse him from that injury. If you (likewise) give something for sin*** *(*an expiatory sacrifice for one's sins*)****, your soul shall see a long-living seed; and God shall want to take away from the pain of his soul, so that he may show him light and forge according to prudence, vindicate the righteous one who works good deeds to many, and their sins He shall remove..*** (Ησαΐας 53,4-11)

This was the prophecy that the Ethiopian could not comprehend. Philip, however, who had gone to meet him upon God's instruction, explained to him that it was referring to the Person of Christ. (Acts 8:31-35)

But it is not only Isaiah. Almost all of the Prophets mention the God-Man Jesus and long for His coming.

In David's psalms it mentions:

«***Sacrifice and offering You did not want, but ears*** (body) ***You fashioned for me. Whole burnt offering and one for sin You did not request. Then I said, "Look, I have come; in a scroll of a book it is written of me. To do your will, O my God, I desired***. » (Psalm 39:7-9)

What is the significance of these prophetic words? The Holy Spirit informs us in the New Testament that the Son -through the mouth of David- speaks to the Father and and refers to His divine Incarnation:

«***...but a body You have prepared for Me.... we will have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all***»... (Hebrews 10:5-10) .... for the sanctification and salvation of mankind...

The same interpretation is given by the Apostle to verse 8:18 of Isaiah:

«***...Here am I and the children whom God has given Me." Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*** (Hebrews 2:13-17).

Also, the Prophet Michaias foresaid that the awaited Christ would be born in Bethlehem and that His origins and His beginning will be beyond even the days of Creation; in his words: «***And you, O Bethlehem, house of Ephratha, are very few in number to be among the thousands of Judah; one from you shall come forth for me to become a ruler in Israel, and his goings forth are from of old, from days of yore***.» In other words, He would be the beginning of the ages (Michaias 5:1) In the New Testament it is written that this prophecy came true in the Person of the Lord (Matthew 2:6).

The Prophet Daniel goes even further, by ascribing to Him the description of Godman:

«... ***lo, as it were a son of man was coming upon the clouds of heaven. And he came as far as the ancient of days, and the attendants were present with him. And royal authority was given to him, and all the nations of the earth according to posterity, and all honor was serving him. And his authority is an everlasting authority, which shall never be removed— and his kingship, which will never perish***. » (Daniel 7:13-14)

The «seed», therefore, of woman would not be a common man, nor, simply, God's chosen one, or a prophet or a national hero. He would be a "powerful God" :

His sovereignty is great, and his peace has no boundary upon the throne of Dauid and his kingdom, to make it prosper and to uphold it

with righteousness and with judgment from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord Sabaoth will do these things. (Isaiah 9:6)

and «...lo, as it were a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven» (Daniel 7:13), in other words, it was the God-Man Christ.

3. Today this prophecy is fulfilled

All of the prophecies of the Old Testament testify about Christ (John 5:39). However, they are all in a "shadow" (Hebrews 10:1), inside a "veil", which «***remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ***» (2 Corinthians 3:14).

For this reason, our Church chants the following on the Eve of Christ's Birth, during the service of the first hour:

«Bethlehem, prepare yourself; Manger, spruce yourself up», «Bethlehem, prepare yourself; Manger, spruce yourself up; Cave, receive inside you; the Truth has come; the shadow has passed. And God has been revealed to mankind from the Virgin. He took on our form and deified the assumption (the whole of man). That is why Adam and Eve are renovated, shouting out: "Favour (Christ) has been revealed on earth, to save our kind."».

The «seed», therefore, of the woman - the «root of Jesse», the Saviour of the world, is Christ (Matthew 1:2-16; Luke 3:23-38). All of the prophecies of the Old Testament which refer to the anticipated redeemer, were fulfilled in the Person of Christ.

The Prophet Isaiah pre-announces the wondrous events of the anticipated Saviour:

«... ***our God is repaying judgment; yes, he will repay; He Himself will come and save us. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute shall be clear, because water has broken forth in the wilderness and a gully in a thirsty land; the dry place shall turn into marshlands, and in the thirsty land there shall be a spring of water; the joy of birds shall be there— a bed of reed and marshlands. A pure way shall be there, and it shall be called a holy way; and the unclean shall not pass by there, nor shall be there an unclean way, but those who have been dispersed shall walk on it, and they shall not go astray. And no lion shall be there, nor shall any of the evil beasts come up on it or be found there, but the redeemed shall walk on it. And those gathered together because of the Lord shall return and come to Sion with joy; everlasting joy shall be above their head, for upon their head shall be praise and gladness, and joy shall take hold of them— pain and sorrow and sighing will have fled away***.» (Isaiah 35:4-10).

Our Christ assures us by His word that these are realized in His Person and in the congregation - as we shall see - of the Church, "in Christ".

When referring to His works, He would say: «***for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me***» (John 5:36). To John's disciples, who asked Him on behalf of their Master if He was the One that was to come, or if they should wait for someone else, He replied:

«...***"Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them***» (Matthew 11:4-5).

When referring to the Prophet Isaiah, He said: «***Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing***» (Luke 4:18-21· cmp Isaiah 61:1-2).

The fulfilment of God's promises in the Person of the Lord was also verified by the elderly prophet Symeon, which had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit - that is, that he would not know death before having seen the Lord's Anointed One. Thus, when the Infant was brought to the Temple, this righteous man came along - inspired by the Holy Spirit - and received the Child in his embrace, glorified God, and exclaimed:

«***Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all peoples; a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people, Israel***.» (Luke 2:29-32).

However, the question is posed: How is it possible for God to become a man? How can the "uncontainable" One be contained in a mother's womb?

This comprises an ineffable mystery, which we are called upon to believe in and to venerate, together with the Virgin Mary, with the righteous Joseph, with the shepherds and the Magi from the Orient. That is why our Church expresses this mystery with the following words in the Matins of Christmas Day:

«*How could the One Who cannot be contained in the whole universe be contained in the womb? Certainly, in the manner that only He knows, that only He wished and favoured. For, although He was fleshless, He was voluntarily incarnated. And the "One Who Is" became for our sake that which He was not; without forsaking His divine nature, He took on our own remnant. Twofold were You born, o Christ, in wanting to replete the world above*».

4. The ultimate Adam

As mentioned earlier, Christ is the Person in Whom the promises (Genesis 12:7) are fulfilledl He is the Patriarch of the New Israel (Romans 4:1-25, 9:6-8, Galatians 3:16, Acts 3:25); He is also the Saviour of the world (Luke 2:11). It is for this reason that He is characterized in the Holy Bible as "the first-born among many brethren" (Romans 8:29, cmp. Hebrews 2:11), and as the "ultimate Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45),

«***The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord, from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption***» (1 Corinthians 15:47-50).

From this passage it is very obvious that what saves man is his descent from the "new Adam" - that is, from Christ. This is the central idea that the Holy Bible repeats many times. «***...For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, was abundant for many***. » (Romans 5:15. cmp. John 3:6, 1 John 1:2-3, Ephesians 2:14-18).

Death came into the world through the first Adam; but through the second one, Christ, resurrection came. «***For, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. […] Christ is the first, afterward those who are Christ's during His coming***» (1 Corinth 15:22-23). When saying that man is saved by his descent from the new Adam - Christ - we are to understand that the Lord is the incarnated Son and Logos of God - the One Who was able to re-connect man to the life of God. Faith, therefore, in Jesus Christ - «***the Son of God, Who was incarnate […]and was made man; and was crucified […] and suffered and was buried; and […] He rose again […] and ascended into heaven, […] and He shall come again***», is imperative and basic for our salvation. (See 1 Corinthians 15:14, Hebrews 2:9-18, Ephesians 2:14-22).

«***And He is the head of the body, the church, Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*** » (Colossians 1:18-20).

«***And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight. if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast…***» (Colossians 1:21-23).

«***But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit***.» (Ephesians 2:13-22).

In this way, we become a «new creation», a new, in-Christ creation, a «new man» (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15).

This is the "good news" - the Gospel - that Christ brought to the world. That is why the Apostles (who undertook the dissemination of that Gospel) were named "deacons of reconciliation".

«***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word*** (the reason) ***of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God***…» (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

Chapter 9 - The Person of the Godman

1. The incarnation of the Logos

«***Let us rejoice in the Lord, narrating the present mystery***». (Come and let us be filled with joy by the Lord, narrating this mystery: the hindrance of the dividing wall is dissolved; the flaming sword has turned its back, and the Cherubim have set free the Tree of Life. Thus, I too can partake of the Paradise of Bliss from where my disobedience drove me out. Because the unvarying image of the Father, the character of His eternicity, has taken on the form of a servant since He came from a Virgin mother without undergoing any transformation: He remained that which He always was - the true God - and He assumed that which He wasn't - He became a man, out of philanthropy. To Him, therefore, let us cry out: "O God, You Who were born of a Virgin, have mercy on us"».

This hymn from the Vespers of Christmas presents the grand mystery of the Divine Incarnation and also reveals the salvific message contained therein.

Saint John the Evangelist referred to this same mystery when he wrote the following, superb phrase:

«***In the beginning was the Word*** *(Logos)* ***and the Word was with God, and the Word was God***. » (John 1:1).

«***And the Word*** *(Logos)* ***became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father***» (John 1:14).

The incarnation of God the Logos without a doubt constitutes God's most prominent revelation of Himself to man: the ultimate Theophany.

Obviously, in this case also, it is not a revelation of God's essence; it is the revelation of the Lord's Person.

It is in this sense that we comprehend the hymn of the 9th Ode of Cheesefare Sunday:

«***It is impossible for people to see God, Whom the hosts of Angels dare not gaze upon, but through You, o Most Pure One, the Logos was made visible to mortals, incarnate; while magnifying Him together with the heavenly Hosts, we beatify You***».

So, it is about the sight of the Lord's Person, with which the Apostles themselves did not become fully acquainted, but only "as much as they were able". Says Saint Dionysios the Areopagite: «He remains latent, even after the revelation», or, to express ourselves in a more divine manner, "...also within the revelation».

2. The divinity of the Lord in the Old Testament

As we have seen, Christ's divinity was already witnessed in the Old Testament (Isaiah 9:6. Mic. 5:1. Daniel 7:14).

But these are not the only cases of witness. Of course, the voice of the Prophets was within a "veil" - it was the "shadow" of the "in Christ" revelation (2 Cor.3:14, Hebr. 10:1, John 5:39) - but the New Testament

shed plenteous light and interpreted the prophecies of the Old Testament, authentically and divinely inspired.

For this reason, we shall mention a few instances where the divinity of the Lord is witnessed, indisputably.

In Psalm 44:7-8, it says: «***Your throne, O God, is forever and ever***. [...] ***you loved righteousness and hated lawlessness. Therefore God, your God, anointed you with oil of rejoicing***... ».

This prophecy is mentioned by the Apostle Paul, who underlines that it is referring to the Christ (Hebr. 1:8-9). In other words, we have here a witness that pertains to God the Father and God the Son.

In Psalms 101:26-28 it says: «***At the beginning it was you, O Lord, who founded the earth, and the heavens are works of your hands. They will perish, but you will endure, and they will all become old like a garment. Like clothing you will change them, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will not fail***».

This prophecy also is mentioned by the Apostle as pertaining to the Person of Christ (Hebr.1:10-12). Consequently, we have here a witness regarding the divinity of the Son and His participation in the opus of the creation of the world.

In passage 2:32 of the Prophet Joel it says: «...***everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved***». It is important to mention here that the Hebrew text has the name "Yahwe" - in other words, "God". Furthermore, the Prophet Isaiah says: «...***and the one who believes in Him will not be put to shame***» (Isaiah 28:16).

The Apostle Paul interprets these passages as follows: «...***that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."*** (Isaiah 28:16) ***For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."*** (Joel 2:32) ***How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?***... » (Romans 10:9-14).

From this divinely inspired interpretation of the Old Testament it is clearly apparent that the prophecies pertain to the Person of Christ, Whom they refer to as "Lord" and "God" - together of course with the Father and the Holy Spirit (cmp. Isaiah 6:3), because the Persons of the Trinitarian God are always united (John 10:30, 14:1-20). And that is the reason the Apostles preached - as we shall see - the name of Jesus Christ.

There are many other witnesses in the Old Testament which are likewise interpreted in the New Testament and which prove the divinity of the Lord (see for example Psalms 109:1 and the interpretation in Mark 12:35-37). Ut us our belief, however, that these few examples that were quoted are sufficient for us to be convinced that the Old Testament proclaims the divinity of the Lord.

3. "Here I have stood, before you came, on the rock..."

As we are informed by the Apostle Peter, it was the Son and Logos of God Who spoke to the Prophets, informing them of events that were to come in the future. To the Prophets - the Apostle said - spoke «***the Spirit of Christ, Who was in them, indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow***» (1 Pet. 1:11).

It is also characteristic how the Apostle Paul refers to the "rock" of the Mount Choreb from which water sprung forth, and he says that God, Who had stood on that rock before, was Christ.

«***And the Lord said to Moyses, "Go on ahead of this people, but take with you some of the elders of the people and the rod with which you struck the river*** (Nile) ***take in your hand, and go. I here have taken my stand, before you came, on the rock at Choreb. And you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, and the people will drink***." » (Exod.17:5-6., cmp. 1 Cor.10:1-5).

4. I am the One Who Is

«He, Who in the past had conversed with Moses on Mount Sinai with symbols, saying "I am He Who Is" and Who today is transfigured upon Mount Tabor, is showing to the disciples the primeval beauty of the image, by having assumed the human essence. Having made Moses and Elijah witnesses of such a Grace, He made them communants of delight, by foreshadowing His glorious and salvific through-the-Cross Resurrection».

This hymn from the Vespers of the Transfiguration relates the Person of the Lord to the Person of God, Who had revealed Himself to Moses.

This same truth is underlined by Basil the Great; this Father of the Church makes reference to the Old Testament passage - Exodus 3:14 - where God reveals His name to Moses and underlines that the same Person is also called "Messenger" (Angelᵇ) and "God". And indeed; In Exodus 3:2 it says that a Messenger (Angel) of God appeared to Moses, in the form of a blazing flame. But afterwards, it says that the voice which was heard said: "***I am the God of your Father, Abraham***", and after this, "***I am the One Who is***" (Exod. 3:14).

«***What, then?***», asks Basil the Great, «***is the same One both 'Messenger***' (Angel) ***and 'God'?***»; and he comes to the conclusion that it is He, about Whom we were taught that «...***he is named Messenger*** (Angel) ***of Great Counsel*** (=volition. Per the Greek text, βουλή (vouli = volition, will) » (Isaiah 9:6).

«***Because, although He afterwards became the 'Messenger*** (Angel) ***of Great Counsel', nevertheless, He previously did not regard the name 'Messenger'*** (Angel) ***as belittling***». We not only see here that the Lord is referred to by Scripture as both 'Messenger' (Angel) and 'God', but also that Jacob himself - when narrating the vision to the women - says: «***And the messenger*** (Angel) ***of God said to me during sleep***...» (Genesis 31:11). And then, after a while: «***...'I am the God who appeared to you at a divine place, there where you anointed a stele to me'...***» (Genesis 31:13).

However, in the Holy Bible it is mentioned that: « "***I am the Lord, the God of Abraam your father and the God of Isaak***"» (Genesis 28:13).

«***The One therefore***», concludes Basil the Great, «***Who is mentioned here as 'Messenger'*** (Angel)***, says that He had revealed Himself there, to Jacob. It is therefore obvious to everyone of us that: where the same Person is referred to as both 'Messenger'*** (Angel) ***and 'God', there the Only-begotten Son is implied, Who appears from generation to generation to mankind, proclaiming the Volition of the Father to His Saints***» (cmp. also, Genesis 16:7, 13).

[þ] angel = Greek, άγγελος (angelos), messenger, also Ευ-αγγελισμός = positive message/announcement (the Annunciation)

5. The divinity of Christ in the New Testament

«***Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." Jesus answered them*** [...] ***If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.***» (John 10:31-38).

«...***Again, the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy!*** » (Mark 14:61-64; cmp. also Matthew 26:63-65, Luke 22:70-71, John 5:18, 4:26).

The following verses clearly testify that Christ Himself admits that He is God; that was the reason men accused Him. (John 10:33). And The Lord accepted the accusation and proclaimed it as being the only truth:

«...***he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me***... » (John 12:45, 14:9). «***I and My Father are one***. » (John 10:30). «...***I am in the Father and the Father is in Me***» (John 14:11, 20, 17:21-23). «***the Father who dwells in Me does the works***» (John 14:10). «***All things have been delivered to Me by My Father***» (Matthew 11:27, John 3:35). «***All authority has been given to Me, in heaven and on earth***» (Matthew 28:18).

«***I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come; the Almighty***» (Revel.1:8. cmp. also 22:13).

Certainly, this statement is not ascribed only to the "Lamb" - that is, the Son - but also to Him «***Who sat on the Throne***» (Revel.21:5), Who instructed John to write that He makes everything new, and that to whoever thirsts, He will give him freely of «***the water of life***» (Revel. 21:5-6; cmp. also, Isaiah 41:4, 44:6). But we also know that the Son is also the One «***Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come***»; that through Him everything was created and that they find their final destination in Him (Colossians 1:15-17). He is the One Who gives the «***water of life***» (John 4:10, 14) and the One Who is the Almighty (Matthew 11:27, 28:18, John 3:35).

Apart from all these testimonies, we also have the testimony of (Messenger) angels and Christ's disciples:

«***And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; that is also why the Holy One Who is to be born will be called the Son of God***», said the angel (Gabriel) to the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:35).

«***He will save His people from their sins***» the ***angel*** informed the righteous Joseph (Matthew 1:21).

«***For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord***», the ***angels*** said to the shepherds (Luke 2:11).

«***"Truly You are the Son of God!"***» His ***disciples*** said to Him, and worshipped Him (Matthew 14:33, 16:16).

But the question is posed: In what sense should we comprehend this characterization? In the spiritual sense - that is, in the sense that "every person is a son of God", or in the natural sense, because a person partakes of the same divine nature as the Father, Who, as we mentioned, begets the Son pre-eternally?

In the Old Testament, it is mentioned that the Lord existed pre-eternally and that through Him everything was created (Psalms 44:7-8, Hebrews 1:8-9, Psalms 101:26-28, Hebrews 1:10-12). Christ Himself assures us, that even before the world came into being, He was enveloped «***by the Father, with the glory which He had before the world was***» (John 17:5, Philippians 2:6).

The Apostle Paul mentions that God saved us according to His Grace, «...***which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ...***» (2 Tim. 1:9-10).

All of the aforementioned prove that the Lord is the pre-eternal Son of the Father - the Incarnate God the Logos (John 1:1, 14) - the Son of God, according to His divine nature, and not by Grace. He was begotten; He was not created (Psalms 2:7, Hebrews 1:5).

This mystery - of God's "kenosis" (self-evacuation) - is analysed with clarity by the Apostle Paul. He says, therefore, of Christ:

«...Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.» (Philippians 2:6-11). In this passage it is testified without a doubt that Christ is - according to His divine essence - the Son of God; that is, God.

We also surmise the same thing from Peter's confession, and more so from the response by Christ Himself:

« ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"***», Peter said (Matt.16:16). To which the Lord replied:

« ***"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven***.» (Matth.16:17; cmp. Gal. 1:15-16).

If Peter's confession signified that Christ was the Son of God in the spiritual sense, then why did the Lord reply that this truth could only have been revealed to him by the heavenly Father? Did the contemporaries of the Apostles perhaps believe that Christ is the Son of God in the natural sense? Of course not. That is the reason Peter needed God's revelation and not the testimony of men.

But it was not only Peter; other Apostles also testify to Christ's divinity:

«***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God***». «***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth***» (John 1:1-14).

«***This is the true God and eternal life***», says John (1 John 5:20).

«***And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"*** (John 20:28).

The Apostle Paul reminds the elders of Ephesus that the Holy Spirit rendered them bishops (overseers), so that they would minister to the Church of God, «***which He purchased*, through His own Blood***» (Acts 20:28).

OODE Note* **Greek verb in Gospel text: περιεποιήσατο (pron. peri-epi-isatoh), meaning "established, founded"**

In Ephesians he writes: « ...***His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; Who, being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...***». In other words, Christ is the Seal of God's hypostasis (Hebrews 1,2-3).

When addressing Titus, he makes mention of «...***our great God and Savior Jesus Christ***» (Titus 2:13)

To the Colossians he says: «...***for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily***» (Coloss.2:9. also 1:19).

Finally, to Timothy he says that the great mystery of godliness is in the fact that «***God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.***» (1 Tim. 3:16).

All the above - and in particular the words "justified in the Spirit" - that is, the witnessing by the Holy Spirit as to the divinity of the Lord - constitutes the unshakeable foundation of our faith in the divinity of the Lord as well as our confession of the same, which secures salvation. (Joel 3:5, Isaiah 28:16, Romans 10:9-13, Acts 4:12).

6. The "Lamb" of the Apocalypse

Christ's divinity is also proclaimed in the last Book of the Holy Bible: The Book of Revelations of John.

When Christ's disciple saw the sealed book, which no-one could open - not in the heavens nor on the earth - he began to cry inconsolably for the misery of the human race, which was to remain in the darkness of ignorance. Then, one of the elders proceeded to speak, saying: ***«..."Do not weep. Behold, the***

Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." » (Revel. 5:5).

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the root of David, is Christ (Matthew 1:2-16). He is mankind's only saviour Matth.1:21); no-one else can deliver mankind from the darkness of ignorance and from the abyss of sin (Acts 4:12).

John later on sees the Lord in the form of the Lamb, and in an upright stance:

«And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth...» (Revel. 5:6).

The upright stance of the Lamb denotes the resurrection of Christ and in fact the resurrection of the Lord's whole Body; just as the Apostle Thomas was called on to see Christ's wounds on His resurrected Body, in the same way John also saw the Body of the Lamb marked by the wounds. That is the reason he says, «***as though it had been slain***». But the Lamb's stance was upright. This means John saw the resurrected Body of the Lord, and in fact, in all its omnipotence (the seven horns) and His omniscience (seven eyes). The four living creatures represent the whole Church, which will be reigning together with Christ.

«...***Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. And when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song...***» (Revel. 5:7-8).

In other words, we note that the entirety of the Church offers a veneration of worship to Christ, while it lauds and exalts not only God the Father (Whom John sees seated on the throne), but also the God-man Christ:

«***And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: " Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshipped Him...***» (Revel. 5:13-14).

On the basis of the Holy Bible, we cannot give any other interpretation to this veneration. Veneration of worship belongs only to God (Matth. 4:10, Deut. 5:9, 6:13). The Apostle John falls at the feet of the Angel to worship him, but he replies:

«***See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God...***» (Revel.19:10).

In these last times that John's Revelations refer to, the veneration of worship is inconceivable, even when it has to do with an angel. The reason for this is that worship is an exclusive right that belongs to God.

Thus, when the entire Church is portrayed in the Revelation as worshipping the Son just as She does the Father, is because She recognizes Christ as a true God - or, as mentioned in the Epistle of Judas - as «***the only Lord God***» (Jude 4).

The Holy Bible further underlines that those who do not acknowledge Christ as «***the only Lord God***» (Jude 4) - that is, as God - are exposed to the danger of death and that consequently, the duty of each and every Christian is to strive in every possible way to lead them to the faith of Christ, «p***ulling them out of the fire***» (Jude 1:22).

In order therefore to live, it is imperative that we believe in Christ, because « ***He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him***.» (John 3:36; cmp.14:6. 1 John 5:12-20).

«***He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God***» (Jphn 1:10-13).

7. In authority and power

«***And many of the people believed in Him, and said, "When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?" The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him***» (John 7:31-32).

«***On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Therefore, many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So, there was a division among the people because of Him. [44] Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him. Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?" The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!"*** » (John 7:37-46).

We also have miracles in the Old Testament, where the Word of God was conveyed by the mouths of the Prophets ("thus said the Lord"!). But those miracles took place pursuant to prayer, and in the name of God (See for example Kings III 17:20-24, 18:36-39. I Kings 2:14, 4:32-37), whereas the Lord was given «***"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth***....» (Matthew 28:18) - even the authority to forgive sins (see Matthew 9: Mark 2:5, Luke 5:20).

The works of the Lord that testify to His divinity are in the following passages: (John 5:36, 10:25; cmp. Matthew 4:23, 11:5, 15:31; Mark 7:37; Luke 7:22, cmp. Isaiah 61:1-2):

« ***"Young man, I say to you, arise!"***» (Luke 7:14), He said to the widow's dead son (cmp. Luke 8:54, John 11:43).

«***He said to the man, "Stretch out your arm." And he stretched it out, and his arm was restored as whole as the other***», He said to the man with the withered arm (Μάρκος 3,5. Ματθαίος 12,13).

«***Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm***» upon His command (Mark 4:39).

«***He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!"*** » He commanded the wicked spirit (Mark 9:25).

But the Lord did not only work miracles, He also spoke with authority (see Matthew 7:29, Mark 1:22, John 7:46).

« ***"You have heard that it was said to those of old...."***» He repeats in His Sermon on the Mount, and each time, He adds: «...***But I say to you...***» (Matthew 5:21-48).

8. The name of Jesus

«***...and nations will hope in his name***» (Isaiah 42:4). According to this irrefutable witness, this prophetic utterance applies to the name of Christ (Matthew 12:21).

«***Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem...And you are witnesses of these things***» (Luke 24:46-47).

The kerygma (preaching) in the name of Christ - or, better still, **of** the name of Christ - is imperative for man's salvation. For man to be saved, he must believe «***in the name of the only-begotten Son of God***» (John 3:18, 14:1). «***To those who believe in His name***», the Lord gives the authority «***to become children of God***» (John 1:12; cmp. 1 John 5:13).

«***"...nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*** » (Acts 4:12; Cmp. 13:38-39; Rom. 3:22).

Faith in the name of Christ secures communion with the One, Trinitarian God - in other words, our partaking of salvation. And this, because through Jesus Christ «***we both have access by one Spirit to the Father***» (Ephesians 2:18). But, for one to come to Christ and acknowledge His Sovereignty, he must be «***drawn***» by the Father (John 6:44) and be «***in the Holy Spirit***» (1 Corinth. 12:3).

Of everything that has been said, it is clearly obvious that through the name of Christ, we Christians believe, confess and invoke the One and Trinitarian God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle exhorts us to thank God the Father always, for everything, «***in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ***» (Ephesians 5:20). Every single thing that we do, whether in word or in act, we should do in the name of the Lord Jesus, «***giving thanks to the God and Father through Him***» (Colossians 3:17).

The Lord Himself reassures us that the petitions which are made in His name are fulfilled (John 14:13-14, 16:23).

Indeed, He gave His disciples the authority to perform miracles - in His name (Matthew 10:1, Mark 3:15, 6:7-13, 16:17-20, Luke 9:1-2, 10:9, 17-19). The Acts of the Apostles report many such miracles in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:43, 5:12, 8:7, 14:10).

«***..."In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk"*** », Peter said to the lame beggar (Acts 3:6, cmp. 4:10, 9:34).

«***... "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her."*** », Paul commanded the demon that the servant had inside her (Acts 16:18).

The baptism of the faithful was performed in the name of the Trinitarian God (Matthew 28:19); the Apostles in their sermon however underlined baptism in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38, 19:5), without this of course signifying that they didn't observe the whole of the Lord's commandment (Matthew 28:19). Whosoever was baptized became a «***Witness of Christ***» (Acts 1:8, Luke 24:47-48) and was named a «***Christian***» (Acts 11:26, 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16). That is why the congregations of true Christians always took place in the name of Christ (Matthew 18:20).

With all the above, we see that true faith - which leads to salvation - relates to faith in the name of Christ.

That is also why he is blessed, who becomes hated by all «***for Christ's name's sake***» (Matthew 10:22, Mark 13:13) and who will be reviled and persecuted, and all kinds of evil said against him falsely (Matthew 5:11, Luke 6:22); he will be delivered up to councils and scourged in their synagogues; he will be brought before judges and put to death (see Matthew 10:7-18, Luke 21:12-17). «***If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you [...] But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter***» (1 Peter 4:14-16).

If one suffers as a Christian - that is, as one who bears the name of Christ, Who is the incarnated and only truth (John 14:6) - then he is suffering for the sake of the truth. He should not feel ashamed for this, but instead, he should give praise to God through that name. But if one is not persecuted for the sake of Christ's name, he should - according to the Apostle - be ashamed. He has no right to boast, because he is not suffering for the sake of the truth.

We should underline this point particularly, because there are deluded people, who maintain that they are being persecuted and imprisoned for the sake of the truth, but without bearing the name of Christ - without preaching that name; in other words, without actually being "witnesses of Christ". These people are not suffering for the sake of the truth, but because they are distorting the meaning of the Holy Bible and become transgressors of the Laws of the State. In other words, while the Holy Bible institutes respect and obedience towards terrestrial lords and the observance of all those duties that belong to them (see Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-16, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Titus 3:1, Proverbs 8:15-16, Wisdom of Solomon 6:1-3, Jeremiah 34:6, Hebrew text: 27:6, Acts 22:17-29, Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25), they do not obey the laws of the State, they do not consent to weapons (even though this is not forbidden by the Holy Bible - Luke 3:14) and through this disobedience, they undermine the foundations of legal order and for that, they are justifiably persecuted. All such instances should, according to the unerring word of the Holy Bible, be ashamed (1 Peter 4:14-16).

On the contrary, the true witnesses of our Christ are blessed and joyful when they are hated and persecuted, because they are undergoing all these things for the sake of Christ's name, Whom they preach with their words and their lives. In the face of this immense duty, they are not intimidated by any threat (cmp. Acts 4:18-20, 5:28-42). They know that they aren't saved by their faith in a God Who is impersonal or abstract, but their faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ and their confession of the name of Jesus Christ. That is also the reason the Holy Martyrs whom John sees «***under the altar***» are the souls of those who had been slain «***for the word of God and for the testimony***» of the Lamb (Revelation 6:9).

This name has, for our salvation, such an importance for our salvation, that the unerring word of God reassures us that the children of the Kingdom shall have the name «***of God and of the Lamb***» written on their foreheads(see Revelation 22:3-4). We therefore should bear that name - that is, we should be called and should actually be Christians - and live in the world as "witnesses of Christ"; we must furthermore invoke that name, the way that all pious Christians do, and the way that the Lord exhorts us (see John 14:13-14, 16:23):

«Our Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, the sinner! ».

9. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either

«***Children, it is the last hour; and just as you have heard the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They came out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, so that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that every lie is not of the truth***» (1 John 2:18-21).

«***Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is an antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you***» (1 John 2:22-26).

«***But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies*** (heresies of perdition)***, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction***» (2 Peter 2:1).

These words of the Holy Bible are a clear warning for all of us. Whoever has the "anointing" of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20) - that is, whoever remains inside the Church, and whoever preserves inside him "that which he heard from the beginning" (2:24) - he will remain "in the Son and in the Father" (2:24). But whoever denies the Lord Jesus Christ, well, he belongs to the "heresies of perdition", which have as a result a "swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1).

Chapter 10 - The Person of the Holy Spirit

1. The other Paraclete (Consoler)

Our Lord Jesus Christ, just prior to His venerable Passions, promised His disciples the following:

«***And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete, to abide with you forever: the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you***» (John 14:16-17)***.***

«***But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all the things that I said to you***» (John 14:26).

« ***"But when the Paraclete comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father - the Spirit of truth, Who proceeds from the Father - He will testify of Me"***» (Ιωάννης 15,26).

«***"...but if I do depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will judge the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they do not believe in Me"; [...] "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them yet. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you***» (John 16:7-14).

All the above passages of the Holy Bible clearly reveal the Person of the Holy Spirit.

We need to underline this fact, because there are heretical people who deny that the Holy Spirit constitutes a particular Person.

When referring to the Person of the Holy Spirit, the Lord says «***He, Him, His***» (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13), and He also speaks of «***another Paraclete***» (John 14:16) - that is, of a specific Person - Who is clearly distinguished from the Father and the Son (John 14:26). This was the Paraclete that Christ saw when He was in the Jordan, descending upon Him «***like a dove***» (Matthew 3:16).

2. The Holy Spirit - the third Person of the Holy Trinity

«"...***and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diverse kinds of of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all..."***» (1 Corinthians 12:3-7).

The Third Person of the Holy Trinity is defined in the Symbol of Faith (Creed) as «...***the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Creator of life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets...***».

These all denote the faith of our Church in the divinity of the Holy Spirit. In all of its passages that we mentioned pertaining to the Trinitarian God, the Holy Bible certifies the divinity of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity; however, certain ill-intentioned people maintain that the Holy Spirit is not God, but an

"energy" of the Father, or even of the Son also. This is not possible, because the Lord Himself referred to the Holy Spirit as «***another Paraclete*** (Consoler)» (John 14:16), Who is «***sent by the Father***» in the name of Christ (John 14:26).

Additionally, the Lord distinguished between the Holy Spirit and the Person of the Son, when He said:

«... ***"And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven***» (Luke 12:10; cmp Hebrews 10:29).

The Holy Spirit cannot possibly be a mere "energy" of the Father, because then, how is it that the Apostle refers to the Spirit as «Spirit of the Son», Whom God sends to our hearts and Who cries out «Abba, the Father»? (Galatians 4:6; cmp.1 Peter 1:11). How, then, does the Lord say that the Spirit is sent «***in His name***» (John 14:26) and that the Spirit will take from whatever is of the Son and proclaim it? (John 16:14).

3. Other testimonies of the Holy Bible

«***Then one of the seraphim was sent to me, and he had in his hand a live coal that he had taken from the altar with the tongs. And he touched my mouth and said:***

"Behold, this has touched your lips, and it will take away your lawlessness and purify your sins."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,

"Whom should I send, and who will go to this people?"

And I said,

"Here am I; send me!"

And he said, "Go, and say to this people:

'You will hear by listening but you will not understand; and by looking you will see but you will not perceive; for, this people's heart has grown fat, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and they have shut their eyes so that they might never see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and return and I heal them."» (Isaiah 6,6-10)

You will hear clearly, but you will not understand; you will observe carefully, but you will not see; because the hearts of the people have become insensitive and they listen heavily with their ears and they keep their eyes partly closed, for fear that they will hear with their ears and perceive with their heart and repent, and be healed by Me....

The Apostle Paul refers to this excerpt and underlines that it was the Holy Spirit Who spoke to the Prophet Elijah:

«...***The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, "Go to this people"***» (Acts 28:25-27). But, we know that the Prophet had received the instruction to preach repentance to the people, on behalf of «***the Lord Sabaoth***», Whom he had seen «***sitting on a throne, lofty and raised up,*** and

Who was surrounded by seraphim around Him, which kept their faces covered in the presence of the Lord's glory, while they chanted***: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth; the whole earth is full of his glory."*** (Isaiah 6:1-3).

As mentioned, this passage is a testimony of the Old Testament regarding the Triadic status of God. This Trinitarian interpretation of the passage is fully aligned with the proclamation by the Apostle that it was the «Holy Spirit» Who spoke to the Prophet (Acts 28:25). The Spirit, therefore, speaks with the Father and the Son to the Prophet Isaiah; or, better still, the Father speaks "through the Son, in the Holy Spirit". And elsewhere, the Apostle mentions characteristically: «***...the Lord is the Spirit***» (2 Corinthians 3:17).

The passage that we mentioned from the Prophet Elijah is not unique in the Old Testament. In the Prophet Jeremiah it says:

«***Behold, days are coming, quoth the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Iouda***». «...***I will give my laws in their mind, and I will engrave them on their hearts*** [...] ***and I will remember their sins no more***» (Jeremiah 38:31-34; Hebrew text: 31:31-34).

When referring to this passage the Apostle Paul observes that here, witness is given by «***the Holy Spirit***» (Hebrews 10:15-17).

This same Person of the Holy Trinity we also observe in the New Testament as giving instructions to the Apostles (Acts 13:2, 20:22-23). The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians that the Holy Spirit «***...For the Spirit searches all things, yes, even the depths of God***» (1 Corinthians 2:10); while in Ephesians he writes «***And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption***» (Ephesians 4:30). Finally, the Apostle Peter explicitly refers to the Holy Spirit as «God» (Acts 5:4; cmp. John 4:24).

4. The deniers of the Holy Spirit

But one cannot reach this truth on his own. He must be guided by the Holy Spirit Himself. Of course, «***the Spirit blows where He wills***» (see John 3:8) and we cannot place any limitations on Him. But we also cannot separate the Holy Spirit from the Father and from the Son. "**The Father can never be considered without the Son**", says Saint Gregory of Nyssa, "**nor the Son without the Holy Spirit. Just as it is impossible for one to ascend to the Father if one is not elevated through the Son, in the same way it is impossible for one to call Jesus 'Lord' except only in the Holy Spirit"**...

«***...and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit***» (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Therefore, it is not possible for one to have the Spirit of God outside of Christ - that is, outside of the Church. It is, as we said, that which the Lord Himself underlines when He says that the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father, in the name of the Son (John 14:26). We must bear the name of Christ - we must become members of the Church - in order to acquire the Holy Spirit.

«***But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things***», says the Apostle John when addressing the members of the Church (1 John 2:20). The Apostle Paul adds the following: «***In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation*** (Christ)***; in Whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is the betrothal of our inheritance***

until the redemption of the purchased possession (i.e. the people of God)***, to the praise of His glory***» (Ephesians 1:13-14. Cmp 4:30).

People who are outside of the Church are not in a position to receive the Spirit, because «***they do not see Him, nor do they know Him***» (John 14:17). That is the reason they deny His divinity. Christians (the members of the Church) however do know Him, «***because He dwells inside them***» (John 14:17). That is the reason they believe and confess the divinity of the third Person of the Holy Trinity.

5. The opus of the Paraclete (Consoler)

«***Because the spirit of the Lord fills the world and that which holds all things together has knowledge of what is said***», mentions the Holy Bible (Wisdom of Solomon 1:7. Cmp.12,1; Acts 2:2), while our Church chants the following:

«**The Spirit provides everything; He exudes prophecies, He perfects priests, He taught wisdom to the illiterate, He proved fishermen to be theologians, bringing together the whole institution of the Church. O Paraclete, Thou of the same Essence and co-enthroned with the Father and the Son, glory to Thee**».

The opus of the Holy Spirit is to guide the faithful - through sacred Baptism - to Christ; to incorporate them into His holy Body - that is, into the Church (1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 2:18, 4:4); to distribute the various charismas (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Ephesians 4:4-13) and to compose and build up through them the whole institution of the Church (1 Corinthians 14:4, 12:26).

«***and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit***» (1 Corinthians 12:3). This primeval truth we can see being applied, even in those very Apostles.

As we know, the Lord's disciples abandoned their crucified Master and fled (Matthew 26:56), because they had not understood the warnings that He had given them regarding His Passion and His Resurrection (John 3:14-15, Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:18-19, Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34, Luke 9:22, 44, 18:31-33). The significance of the Lord's words «***was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken***» (Luke 18:34).

After the Resurrection, Christ «***opened***» the minds of the disciples «***that they might comprehend the Scriptures***» (Luke 24:45) and He promised them that they would receive «***power from on high***», «***when the Holy Spirit has come upon you***» (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8). Christ also promised them that He (the Paraclete) would testify about Him (John 15:26, 1 John 5:6); that He would «***remind***» them of everything He (Christ) had taught them (John 14:26) and He would reveal His (Christ's) glory (John 16:14), so that the Apostles would be rendered «***witnesses of Christ***» (Luke 24:48, Acts 1:8).

Indeed, on the Day of the Pentecost, the disciples «***...were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance***» (Acts 2:1-4. Cmp. Acts 2:17, 33, Joel 3:1-5).

This «***filling***» by the Holy Spirit had rendered them capable of believing absolutely in the name of the Lord (1 Corinthians12:3)

The Holy Spirit therefore leads one towards the faith in the Person of Christ and in the "in-Christ" way of life. That is why The Holy Spirit is also referred to as «Spirit of the Son» (Galatians 4:6).

«***And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit*** [...] ***and I will give my spirit in you and will act so that you walk in my statutes and keep my judgments and perform them***», said the mouth of God through the Prophet Ezekiel (36:26-27).

The presence of the Holy Spirit inside the heart of the faithful person constitutes a «***sign***» - the characteristic mark of the reborn person - and at the same time, the commencement of the Kingdom of God. «***For, as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by Whom we cry out, "Abba, Father"...***» (Romans 8:14-16): You, however, have received the Spirit of adoption which renders you children of God, so that with every familiarity you can cry out to God: Abba, Father!

«***The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God***» (Romans 8:16). In fact, at another point the Apostle says that the Holy Spirit Himself - Who was sent to us by God - «***cries out inside our hearts "Abba, Father"***» (Galatians 4:6).

Thus, the holy Spirit is the cause and the source of a person's spiritual life (cmp. Romans 5:5, Galatians 5:22-25). For a person to be Spiritual, he must be «***drawn***» - led - by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit must be, according to Saint John the Chrysostom, the governor of his life, in the manner of the captain of a ship and the charioteer of a chariot.

When we live «***in the Spirit***», we become a «***Temple of the Holy Spirit***» (1 Corinthians 6:19) and we are built «***on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit***» (Ephesians 2:18-22). That is when man fulfils the end purpose of his life and is actually redeemed, because he will have returned to his primeval unity with the Trinitarian God, from Whom he had distanced himself on account of the Fall.

«***But you are not 'in the flesh', but*** (rather) ***'in the Spirit', if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you***»... You are not carnal, but rather you are spiritual, if of course the Spirit of God dwells inside you, as the Apostle Paul characteristically says (Romans 8:9).

«***The Spirit, Who dwells in us, yearns jealously***». The Spirit, Who has resided inside us, desires to a jealous degree says the Apostle James (James 4:5); therefore, there is no place inside us for the spirit of the world, «***because the Lord your God, Who is present with you, is a jealous god. Lest the Lord your God, being angered with wrath against you, destroy you utterly from the face of the earth***» (Deuteronomy 6:15).

That is, if a Christian has become the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:18-22, Romans 8:9), it is impermissible for him to obey any other "***spirit***"; he must be «***drawn***», be led only by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14).

«***Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep!***... », concluded the Apostle James (James 4,7-9).

«***And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do…***». the Lord promised characteristically (John 14:13). However, our petitions to the Lord must be made «***in the Spirit***» (Jude 20), or, rather, together with the Spirit, Who dwells inside us.

«***Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God***» (Romans 8:26-27)

«***You ask and you do not receive***», says the Apostle James (James 4:3), which means that we are not being «***drawn***» - we are not allowing the Holy Spirit lead us into prayer (Romans 8:14) - but instead, we are drawn by our own wills, and do not pray "in the Spirit".

All the above make it clear why a contemporary saint of our Church - Saint Seraphim of Sarov - used to say that the true purpose of Christian living is to acquire the Holy Spirit. Saint Makarios the Egyptian adds that Grace develops within the person who becomes the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit and becomes one with His essence, just like leaven with dough.

That is why our Church names the Holy Spirit «God and Deifier» (Hymn of the Pentecost) and chants the following during Matins on Sundays:

«By the Holy Spirit every soul is animated and through cleansing is elevated, illuminated by the Triadic One, mystically »

In other words, each soul acquires life through the Holy Spirit; it is elevated through catharsis (cleansing) and is brightened mystically through the illumination of the Holy Trinity's light.

Chapter 11 - The All-Holy Mother of All the World

1. The Virgin Mary in the Old Testament

As we have already mentioned, the entire period of the Old Testament is a period of expectation, for the «***offspring of the woman***» (Genesis 3:15).

The Prophet Isaiah receives an instruction from God to speak to Achaz, the king of the Judeans and warn him to take precautions, but without being afraid of any attack on Jerusalem by Kings Phakee and Raasson:

«…***"for when my fierce anger comes, I will heal again"***…», i.e., when the justified wrath of My anger is realized, I again shall protect you, said the Lord (Isaiah 7:4)

Per God's instruction, the Prophet tells Achaz to «***Ask for yourself a sign of the Lord your God, in depth or in height***» (Isaiah 7:10-11) - that is, miraculous proof - either in the depths of the earth or even in the heights of heaven - in order to be reassured of the veracity of the prophetic word.

«***But Achaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I put the Lord to the test."*** Then he said: ***"Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to provoke a fight with mortals? How then do you provoke a fight with the Lord? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and you shall name him Emmanuel..."***» (Isaiah 7:12-14). The name Emmanuel meant "God is with us".

The meaning of this «***sign***» has, of course, a double reference. God was announcing in this manner the salvation of Jerusalem and the punishment of her enemies, but, at the same time, it was testifying about the person of the Theotokos - the Mother of the Lord and Savior of the new people of God - the new Jerusalem.

«***So, all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet*** (Isaiah)***, saying: "Behold,the virgin shall be with child and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."***» (Matthew 1:21-23) "God is with us" were the words that the Angel of the Lord said to the righteous Joseph, who was having doubts on account of the Virgin Mary's pregnancy.

The woman, therefore, that God spoke of to the first-created people (Genesis 3:15) and to King Achaz, was the Virgin Mary (cmp. also, Isaiah 9:1-2, Matthew 4:14-16, Micah 5:2).

The prophetic word of the Old Testament speaks of the Theotokos Mary in many other places also. We quote here one more excerpt, from the Prophet Ezekiel, which prophesied the ever-virginal state of the Theotokos:

«***And he turned me by the way of the outer gate of the holies that looks to the east, and it was shut. And the Lord said to me: "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall go through it, because the Lord, the God of Israel, shall enter through it, and it shall be shut. Therefore, the leader—he shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by the way of the ailam of the gate, and he shall go out by this way"***» (Ezekiel 44:1-3).

This again pertains to the ever-virginal Theotokos; She is the Gate, which, even before the birth of the Lord but also after the birth, remained sealed and no-one passed through it. That is why the hymn of our Church mentions:

«***Rejoice - thou, the only Gate, whom only the Logos passed through; thou, who, by your birth labours crushed the locks and Gates of Hades. Rejoice - thou, the divine entrance of those wanting to be saved, the all-praised One***».

In accordance with the Prophetic word, the Virgin Mary remained a Virgin - **before**, **during** and **after** the Birth (see also Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25). That is why She is portrayed in iconography with three stars - on Her forehead and Her shoulders: to symbolize precisely Her ever-virginal state.

2. Why we honour the Virgin Mary

The Holy Bible informs us that the Angel who appeared to the Virgin Mary on the day of the Annunciation addressed Her as "***full of Grace***", telling Her that the Lord is with Her; that She is "***blessed among women***" and that She has ***"found favour with God"***. (Luke 1:28-30). She is also informed that the Holy Spirit will descend upon Her and that She will be overshadowed by the power of the Lord on high; that She will bear a Son, Who shall be great and shall be called "Son of God" and that «***He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end"***» (Luke 1:33).

The same Evangelist mentions that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, «...***the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."***

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed» (Luke 1:41-48).

These words of the Holy Bible bestow immense honour to the Virgin Mary. God Himself characterizes Her as "full of Grace"; Elizabeth - guided by the Holy Spirit - addresses Her as "blessed among women" and "the Mother of my Lord"; John the Baptist - while still in the womb of his mother Elizabeth - leaps for joy at the visit of the Theotokos; the Virgin Mary Herself glorifies the Lord and prophesies that She will be glorified and be called "blessed" by all the generations of mankind.

"So, if Christ is the Saviour, why do you bestow such honour to the Virgin Mary?" we are asked by heretic persons.

This is not difficult for one to understand. The renewal of the bonds with God, the renovation of mankind's nature by the divine nature of Christ, and the partaking of human nature in divine life, were realized with the incarnation of Christ - inside the womb of the Virgin Mary. Whatever honour we people might bestow on the Virgin Mary will never reach the honour bestowed on Her by God Himself: to acquire flesh within Her womb and render Her the "Theotokos" (=who gave birth to God).

Faith in the God-human status of Christ obliges us to also honour the instrument of His incarnation, that is, the Theotokos. If we do not do this, how can we possibly believe in a God-***human*** Jesus?

But the Holy Bible itself - as we have seen - also testifies about this honour. The Virgin Mary perceives this honour as something self-understood, and ascribes it to the Godman Jesus Who was born of Her (Luke 1:48): «...***He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed***...».

We therefore honour the Virgin Mary because She was first honoured by Christ Himself, and because this is a command of the Holy Bible. Naturally, we believe that the Virgin Mary is not the **source** per se of salvation; Christ is our Redeemer. Christ assumed human nature and He healed it, and He became for mankind the «new Adam», or «new root». But this root sprouted inside the womb of the Virgin Mary. That was the reason Saint John the Chrysostom called the feast-day of the Annunciation of the Theotokos «the feast of the root».

The Holy Mother, therefore, became the cause for human nature to partake of the divine life - the bridge that re-connected man and all of Creation with the Trinitarian God - because all three Persons of the Holy Trinity participated in Christ's Incarnation: the Son - Who was sent by God the Father - acquired flesh, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit inside the body of the Virgin Mary.

The Virgin Mary is the «Bridge» that linked heaven to earth and recalled all of Creation back to the bosom of God's love. That is why the Birth of Christ by the Virgin Mary is not celebrated by mankind only, but by all of Creation: the heavens and the stars, angels and mankind, the earth and the cave, the Magi and the shepherds... everyone rejoices with the event of the renewal of the betrothal of the celestial Bridegroom to the Church. It suffices to observe an icon of the Nativity to become aware that with Christ's Birth, all of Creation is transformed.

As such, the honoring of the Virgin Mary is always linked to the Person of Christ. In other words, She is always honored as «***Mother of the Lord***» (Luke 1:43), Who was - for Her also - «***God and Saviour***» (Luke 1:47).

It is for this reason that the Orthodox Church teaches that the Virgin Mary is **not exempt** of the ancestral sin. She too had inherited the sinful nature of Adam, except that **She was exempt of personal sins**, because She was the «***chosen vessel***» and «***full of Grace***».

The Virgin Mary was therefore a genuine child of this world - a world groaning within sin - which is why She represents it in its entirety and can restore its communion with the Saviour of the world, Who took on flesh inside Her. And that is why our Church offers Her the following, exquisite hymn:

«***More precious than the Cherubim, and more glorious incomparably than the Seraphim, Thou, who incorruptibly gave birth to God the Logos - Thou, the truly Theotokos - we magnify Thee***».

3. Who became in the flesh through the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin

The Virgin Mary belonged to the people of God who awaited the Redeemer Lord.

However, the very Son of the Virgin was Himself the Redeemer. He alone did not inherit the sinful nature of Adam. **The reason for this was because He was not a descendant of Adam**. He was born of the Virgin Mary, by the Holy Spirit.

That is the reason we believe that the Virgin Mary remained a Virgin during and after the birth of Christ - in other words, She was ever-virginal. This is not a mere detail; it is a basic teaching of the Church that secures salvation.

Christ is the «new root»: He cannot possibly be a descendant of the «old root» - namely Adam. For this reason, in order for Mary to be the Theotokos She had to be a Virgin.

4. The person of the Theotokos

But one might perhaps think, if Mary was simply a «chosen vessel» and everything came from God, then what is Her personal contribution to the salvation of the world?

Well, God respects the freedom of even a sinful person - even the person of the Fall and of deterioration. That is why God would never save the world without the consent of the world itself. In view of this, the Virgin Mary became God's collaborator in the opus of salvation of the entire world. Her words « ***"Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to Your word."*** » (Luke 1:38), were not just Her own consent; they were the consent of the entire world. The mouth of the Theotokos became the mouth of all Creation and - at the same time - the instrument of the world's salvation.

On the other hand, the Virgin Mary is also an offering of the whole world to God. Mankind, in the Person of the Theotokos, offers God its purest offering, and God accepts it and renders Her the vessel - the place of His Birth - and the Mother of the human race and the entire world. This is what the following words of the Lord to His beloved disciple, John, signified: «***Behold, your Mother!*** » (John 19:27).

5. The delusion of heretics

Whoever denies the Virgin Mary's personal participation in the opus of our salvation and whoever does not bestow the appropriate honour to the Theotokos, is not moving within the space of the new root of Christ and the new Creation, but instead remains in the era of the Fall and of deterioration and is linked only to the root of the old Adam, who is the root of sin. To a person like that, it is as though Christ was never born.

In other words, whoever does not acknowledge the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos is also denying the Godman status of Christ and cannot be benefited in any way by reading the Holy Bible and by observing Christ's commandments. The reason for this is that it is **not** the Holy Bible that saves us; it is Christ Himself, Who was announced by the Bible. (cmp. John 5:39). **The "whole mystery of divine providence"**

is dependent on the characterization of Mary as "Theotokos", according to saint John of Damascus, **"because if she who gave birth is the Theo-tokos, then the One born of her must be God (Greek "theos"), as well as a man**".

Thus, whoever recognizes the Virgin Mary as Theotokos and believes in the divine-human status of Christ must bestow the appropriate honour to Mary and acknowledge Her as his own mother, per the wish of the Lord (John 19:27).

The splendor of the Virgin Mary, which was bestowed on Her by God Himself, is specially described in the divinely inspired book of Revelations by John:

«***Then a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days***» (Revelations 12:1-6).

It is quite obvious, that this «***sign***» refers to the new people of God, the Church; to the persecutions, but also to the splendour and the final victory of the Church against the forces of the devil (cmp. Micah 4:10, Isaiah 66:7-8). But, at the same time, it includes the glory and the splendour of the Theotokos, who is the beginning and the portrayal of the whole Church - of course always in relation to the One Who is «***the fruit of her womb***» (Luke 1:42).

Chapter 12 - The Church: The Body of Christ

1. The new "people of God"

Sometimes, when we talk about the Church, we imagine it to be an organization that serves certain purposes in people's lives.

This perception however is an erroneous one, because "Church" is the per se communion of people with God also, having as its model the communion of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. This is the reason that the Apostle Paul speaks of «***the providence*** (oekonomia) ***of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God, Who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord***» (Ephesians 3:9-11. cmp. Colossians 1:26).

In this sense, the Church was already existent, in Paradise (Eden - Genesis 3:8); however, man's fall from that primeval communion had as a result the transfer of the Church from Paradise to earth.

In the Old Testament the Church was comprised mainly of God's chosen people - Israel - whose course passed through the desert, with the Promised Land as the final destination. This course is not unrelated to the Person of Christ; «... ***For Israel was an infant, and I loved him, and out of Egypt I recalled his children***», said God through the mouth of Hosee (11:1), and Matthew the Evangelist applies this statement to the Person of the Lord, Who assembled the new people of God, the Church (Matthew 2:15, cmp. Numbers 23:22). Not only the exodus from Egypt and the journey towards the Promised Land, but also the dispersing of Israel during the Babylonian captivity and the promise for its repatriation and its re-assembling, are used by the Prophets when announcing in advance the assembling of Christ's body: the one body, of the Church.

The Prophet Jeremiah forewarns of the laments of Rachel for her descendants, who were carried away in captivity to Babylon, and he proclaims that the tears of her mother will be dried and will be transformed into inexpressible joy for the return of the children of Israel and their reinstatement in a new homeland - a permanent one, no longer in a place of exile:

«***A voice of lamentation and weeping and mourning was heard in Rama; Rachel did not want to stop weeping for her sons, because they are no longer. Thus did the Lord say: Let your voice cease from weeping, and your eyes from tears, because there is a wage for your works, and they shall come back from a land of enemies; there will be permanence for your children***» (Jeremiah 38:15-17. Hebrew Text: 31:15-17).

Of course, the Prophet in this case had in mind the captivity of God's people. But, this event, as well as the "coming back" of which he spoke, is the foreshadowing and the image of another event: that of the dispersal of mankind after the Fall and its re-congregating into the one and only "people of God"; that is, the eventual constitution of the Church in the Person of Christ (see also Matthew 2:18).

The same matter is treated by the Prophet Jeremiah, when speaking of that day on which the Lord shall give His people a "New Testament", but not one that would be similar to the Covenant of Mount Sinai. This new law of God was not going to be written on stone plaques, but inside the hearts of man:

«***Behold, days are coming, quoth the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Iouda. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their fathers [...] I will give my laws in their mind, and I will write them on their hearts, and I will become a god to them, and they shall become a people to me.***» (Jeremiah 38:31-33; Hebrew text: 31:31-33).

Which is that New Testament, of which the prophet spoke? The Apostle Paul uses the same quote and mentions that the "***mediator of a better covenant***" is Christ (Hebrews 8:6-13)

According to the admission of the Saviour Christ, it is the blood of the Lord which is spilled for the sake of God's new people - for the sake of the Church (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20). This was the New Covenantewhich the prophet had pre-announced.

In the words of the hymn of the Great Canon, «***The Church acquired a Krater*** (ancient Greek urn) ***of Your life-giving side, out of which has flowed the double spout - of pardon and of knowledge - as a form of the old, of the new, of the two Testaments together, o our Saviour***».

The blood of our Lord, «***which is shed for many for the remission of sins***» (Matthew 26:28), renders possible once again the congregating of the scattered children of God and the re-composition of His people with the "new heart", which leads people into the unique union with the one Body of Christ - that is, the Church. This is the fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit among this new people of His (1 Corinthians 12:3, Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:30). It is for this reason that the prophet stresses the following:

«***This is what the Lord says: And I will take them in from the nations and will assemble them from the countries, in them where I dispersed them, and I will give them the land of Israel. [...] And I will give them another heart, and I will impart a new spirit in them, and I will draw forth the heart of stone from their flesh***... » (Ezekiel 11:17-19).

«***And I will give my spirit in you and will act so that you walk in my statutes and keep my judgments and perform them***» (Ezekiel 36:27. Cmp. Acts 2:33).

Thus, the Prophets pre-announce a new era - the era of the Paraclete - which is no longer the era of one people but of the entire human race. That is why Isaiah, when addressing the idolatrous peoples invites them also, in view of the day of composition of God's new people, to likewise become a "new creation".

«***Dedicate yourselves to me, you islands! Israel is being saved by the Lord with everlasting salvation***» (Isaiah 45:16-17).

The Apostle Paul names the Church "***Mount Zion***" and "***city of the living God***", "***celestial Jerusalem***" (Hebrews 12:21) and John sees Her descending from heaven, wholly surrounded by the glory of God (Rev.3:12; 22:10, e.a.) This is the image that the Old Testament Prophets also utilize in order to declare the lory of the Church and Her composition out of all the nations and all peoples:

«***And it shall be in the last days, the mountain of the Lord shall be manifest, prepared on the tops of the mountains, and it shall be elevated beyond the hills. And peoples shall hasten to it, and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Iakob, and they will show us his way, and we will walk in his paths." Because out of Sion shall go forth a law, and a word of the Lord from Ierousalem. And he shall judge between many peoples and shall reprove strong nations far away, and they shall cut their swords into plows and their spears into sickles, and nation shall no longer lift up sword against nation, and they shall learn war no more*** [...] ***and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Sion from now and forever***» (Michaias 4:1-3, 7).

This same unity, the love between the faithful and the joy and bliss for the fact of salvation are also described by the rest of the Prophets of the Old Testament:

«...***then I will change the tongue for peoples in its generation, that all might call upon the name of the Lord to be subject to him under one yoke. From the ends of the rivers of Ethiopia they shall bring me offerings***» (Sophonias 3:9-10).

«***...At that time the Lord will say to Ierousalem: Courage, O Sion; do not let your hands grow weak. 17 The Lord your God is in you; a mighty one will save you; perhaps he will bring gladness to you and renew you in his affection, and he will be glad over you with delight as on a day of a feast.***

14 Rejoice, O daughter Sion! Proclaim, O daughter Ierousalem! Be glad, and be delighted with your whole heart, O daughter Ierousalem! 15 The Lord has taken away your injustices; he has redeemed you from the hand of your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more. 16 At that time the Lord will say to Ierousalem: Courage, O Sion; do not let your hands grow weak. 17 The Lord your God is in you; a mighty one will save you; he will bring gladness to you and renew you in his affection, and he will be glad over you with delight as on a day of a feast. (Sophonias 3:14-17)

The cause, therefore, of rejoicing is the presence of the Lord in the midst of His new people: «***Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him***» (John 14:23); we shall come to Him and shall dwell with Him.

This truth is also pre-announced by the Prophet Zechariah:

«***Rejoice, and be glad, O daughter Sion. For behold, I am coming and will tent in your midst, says the Lord. And many nations shall flee to the Lord for refuge on that day and shall become a people to Him, and they will tent in your midst***» (Zechariah 2:10-11).

«***And many peoples and many nations shall come to seek the face of the Lord Almighty in Ierousalem and to appease the face of the Lord***» (Zechariah 8:22).

Malachias also proclaims the ecumenicity of the Church:

«***For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is glorified among the nations, and in every place incense is brought to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord Almighty***.» (Malachias 1:11).

But, the one who speaks with far more clarity regarding the Church is the Prophet Isaiah:

«***Rejoice, O barren one who does not give birth; break forth, and shout, you who are not in labor pains! Because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her that has a husband, for the Lord has spoken. Broaden the site of your tent and of your curtains; make it firm; do not hold back; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes, because you must spread out to the right and to the left, and your offspring will inherit the nations and will inhabit the cities that have become desolate. Do not fear because you were put to shame, neither feel disgraced because you were reproached, because you will forget your ancient shame and the reproach of your widowhood you will not remember, because the Lord is the one who makes you, the Lord Sabaoth is his name, and the one who delivered you is the very God of Israel; he shall be called thus in all the earth. The Lord has not called you as a forsaken and faint-hearted woman, nor as a woman hated from youth, your God has said. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great mercy I will have mercy on you. With a little wrath I turned my face away from you, but with everlasting mercy I have had mercy on you, the Lord who delivered you has said. From the water at the time of Noe, this is my oath: Just as I swore to him at that time that I would no more be angry at the earth because of you, nor as a threat to you would I remove the mountains, nor would the hills be shifted, so neither shall the mercy that comes from me to you fail, nor shall the covenant of your peace be removed, for the Lord said he would be merciful to you***» (Isaiah 54:1-10).

The «barren woman» is God's new people, the «Jerusalem on high», which does not «give birth» in a natural manner, like «the woman who has a husband», but based on God's promises. That is why Her children are an innumerable crowd (Galatians 4:21-31). Because, as the Apostle says in another verse, the children of Abraham (the children of the barren Sarah) are the people of the faith in Christ (Galatians 3:7, Romans 4:1-25, 9:6-8), regardless of their origin.

And that is also why God pre-announces the evangelization of the nations, through the Apostles:

«***And I will leave signs upon them, and from them I will send forth those who are saved to the nations, to Tharsis and Phoud and Loud and Mosoch and Thobel and to Greece and to the islands far away—those who have not heard my name or seen my glory, and they shall declare my glory among the nations. They shall bring your kindred from all the nations as a gift to the Lord, with horses and chariots, in mule-drawn litters with sunshades, into the holy city Ierousalem, said the Lord, so that the sons of Israel may bring to me their sacrifices with music into the house of the Lord***» (Isaiah 66:19-20).

2. And I shall make you my betrothed for eternity

As mentioned in the above prophecy by Isaiah, the communion between God and His people is likened to the communion of love between two spouses. This is the reason that God is characterized in the Old Testament as «zealous» (Exodus 20:5; Numbers 5:9, Deuteronomy 6:15, Jesse 24:19; Ezekiel 39:25). Hence, every infidelity on the part of God's people is characterized as fornication and adultery (Judges 2:17; cmp 21:11, Jeremiah 3:1; 9:13; Ezekiel 6:9, 16:36, Hosee 4:11; Micah 1:7).

In order for God to make clear this close and exclusive bond of love with His people and to motivate them to return during their years of Apostasy, He gave the Prophet Hosiah the instruction to take a whore as his wife (Hos.1:2), which was intended to denote the true condition of the Apostate people.

But at the same time, God announces through the mouth of the Prophet that the bond of love between God and the unfaithful wife (that is, His apostate people), would not be broken; that God Himself would purge His people and renew the bond of betrothal with them:

«***And I will betroth you to myself forever, and I will betroth you to myself in justice and in judgment and in mercy and in compassion. And I will betroth you to myself in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord [...] and I will sow her for Myself in the land. And I will have pity on the not Pitied one, and I will say to not-My -People, "You are my people" and he shall say, "You are the Lord my God."*** » (Hosee, 2,19-20, 23).

These are the prophetic words that the Apostle Paul also uses, when describing the constitution of the Church by Judeans and Gentiles (Romans 9:24-26).

3. The head and the members of the Church

«Salvation did You work in the midst of the earth, o Christ the Lord; on the Cross did You spread Your immaculate arms, gathering together all the nations, who cry out "Lord, glory to You"».

This hymn of the Sixth Hour of Holy Monday proclaims that the new people of God - the Church - is gathered together and constituted through the crucifixional sacrifice of Christ. The Apostle Paul mentions

that the Lord "***acquired***" the Church "***through His own blood***" (Acts 20:28). On the Cross, therefore, the Lord opens His immaculate embrace, in order to receive and to "gather into one" all of the scattered children of God (John 11:52).

But we cannot isolate the crucifixional sacrifice from the other events of Christ's life. That is why we must say that with His Incarnation and His terrestrial life, with His death and His Resurrection, His Ascension and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit, the Lord once again gathers together the scattered people of God and constitutes His Church, by giving Her the initial chastity and purity.

«***Christ***», says the Apostle Paul, «***is the head of the Church and He is the savior of the body*** *[...]* ***just as He loved the Church, and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish***» (Ephesians 5:23-27).

«***And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*** » (Colossians 1:17-20).

The Church, therefore, is the god-human Body of the Lord and Christ Himself is the Head.

Saint John the Chrysostom refers to this miracle, by underlining that "Christ undertook the Body of the Church and He made the Church into His Body."

Thus, when we speak of the "Body of Christ" - which is the Church - we do not mean ONLY the people of God, without Christ, nor do we mean ONLY Christ, without the people of God; we mean both together: Christ, together with the people of God. That is, the Head of the Church together with Her remaining members - us.

The Apostle Paul makes reference to his ministry, by saying characteristically that he desires to fill up his flesh with the sufferings of the Lord: "***I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church...of which I became a minister***" (Colossians 1:24).

In another place he adds:

"***And He put all things under His feet and gave Himself to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."*** (Ephesians 1:22-23).

4. The grafting of members

Christ's Church does not comprise a privilege of one, specific people. It is the new people of God, wherein all people can belong - from whatever race they may originate - as long as they "receive Christ" and live, "rooted and built up in Him":

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." (Col.2:6-7)

"***For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free— and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many."*** (1 Cor.12:12-14; cmp.also Gal.3:28, Eph.4:4-6, Col.3:11).

The Apostle Paul speaks of the assumption of all people into the Church and characterizes Her as "***life from the dead***" (Rom.11:15) and as a "***grafting contrary to nature***" of mankind, from the "***natural, wild olive tree***" onto the "***cultivated olive tree***" - that is, onto the Body of Christ. With this "grafting", man becomes "***a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree***" (Romans 11:17-14), in other words, a partaker of the rich life of Christ.

Without this "grafting" onto the Body of Christ, without rebirth inside the Church, man remains attached to the old root, which leaves him unredeemed - in the realm of corruption and death. It is for this reason that the Apostle himself mentions that true life is hidden "***with Christ, in God***" (Col.3:3). Furthermore, the Apostle John adds that "***he who has the Son has life; but he who does not have the Son of God does not have life***" (1 John 5:12; cmp.also John 11:25, 14:6 and 1 John 1:2).

5. The Church is our salvation

The above help us understand that the Church is not an organization, but a living organism; She is not a union, but a Body: the Divine-human, the resurrected and deified Body of our Lord.

The Church is the god-human organism, the life of God within man and within the world. The Church is Christ together with all people who have been baptized "***into one Spirit***" and have become "***one body***" with Christ, "***whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free***"; together with those who "***have all been made to drink into one Spirit"*** (1 Cor.12:13).

This event - in which man becomes "one body" with Christ - brings him once again near the Triadic God, rendering him a partaker of the divine life (John 17:22-23).

This is the reason by which we believe that the Church is not a simple workshop, which caters to the salvation of man. She is something far more than a workshop. The Church is, Herself, man's salvation.

Christ became a man and sacrificed Himself "***to gather into one the children of God, which were scattered***" (John 11:52). This gathering of God's scattered children "in Christ" is no secondary fact; it is that very fact of salvation.

It is for this reason that we have said that the Church does not merely save, but that She is salvation itself.

The above are very important for our Christian way of life and for our salvation. We need to understand that nobody can - on his own, "by himself" - be and be called a Christian, while separate from his incorporation in the body of Christ, which is simultaneously a communion with brethren (1 Cor.12:12-28).

In other words, each and every person's salvation cannot possibly be his/her own undertaking, irrespective of their incorporation and their life within the Church. That is, for man to be saved, it is not enough to merely believe in God and be certain of His existence. It is not enough to study the Holy Bible and show discipline in his life, nor to observe all the rules of morality and honesty and apply with precision all of Christ's moral teachings. If all the aforementioned are not the result of something else - which is the most fundamental thing - they will not make a man a Christian, nor will they save him.

This is because the terms "Christianity" and "Christian" signify an incorporation in the body of Christ, participation in the life of the Christian community, in the congregating of the faithful, for the purpose of becoming built upon the foundation of "***the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, upon whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord***" and becoming "***a dwelling place of God in the Spirit***" (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Thus, to be a Christian means to be a "***fellow citizen with the saints and members of the household of God***" (Ephesians 2:19); it means to belong to the community of brethren. An abstract faith on its own, which has no consequences on everyday living and does not cost us anything, is not enough.

Furthermore, being God's fellow citizen and household member also entails a constant endeavour, a constant struggle for each and every person, to keep him/her self-clean of passions and of everything else that might offend society and the entire community of brethren, which will result in his/her remaining united with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit, and to increment, into a holy temple in the Lord.

6. Gathered together in the name of Christ

Christ's Church is not comprised of individuals, each of whom lives his/her own "religious" life, independently of the community of brethren. The entirety of God's people constitutes the Body of the Church together with Christ, Who is the Head of the Church's body. Consequently, for a religious gathering to actually be a Church, it must have the essential characteristic element of unity with the Lord and with the brethren. We must also be aware that the ecclesiastic characteristic of a gathering is not necessarily dependent on the number of members present. It is mainly dependent on the presence of Christ in that gathering. The presence of Christ is ensured, even if only two or three people take place in one gathering that will take place in the name of Christ (Matth.18:20).

But when is a gathering actually effected in the name of Christ?

When it is within the Spirit of Christ and is the continuance of Christ's opus, which is the gathering of God's scattered children "***into one***" (John 11:52). Christ Himself had said that "***he who does not gather with Me, scatters abroad***" (Matth.12:30, Luke 11:23)

In other words, a religious gathering can be called Church of Christ, only if it has unity as its result, and not the scattering of God's people. It was for this reason that the Apostle Paul hurried to write as follows to the Corinthians, full of concern for their salvation: "***For, first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you....***" (1 Corinth.11:18)

It is characteristic, how the Apostle does not condemn only those who had elected Paul himself as their religious leader or Apollo or Kephas, but also those who maintained that they are Christ's followers

without having any love and unity with the other brethren (1 Corinth.1:12). The Apostle Paul's stance on this matter is clear: "***Is Christ divided?***" (1 Corinth.1:13)

One cannot claim to be one with Christ, if at the same time he is not also one with his brethren. This is why schism and heresy are the greatest crimes of all, within the Church.

Thus, when we speak of a Christian Church - as, for example, the Church of Corinth - we do not imply any human organization; the Christian community is the result of man's mystical participation in the resurrected and deified Body of Christ, Who is the Head of the entire corpus of the Church. It is, therefore, a community which God Himself had instituted, and one that is realized mystically, through Baptism and the Holy Eucharist (1 Corinth.12:12-14 and 10:16, Ephes.4:4-6).

7. The first Christian community

Christ Himself composed the first Christian community, with His selection of the "twelve", whom He named "apostles" (Luke 6:13). To them He gave "power and authority" and He sent them forth to proclaim about the "Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:1-2, cmp. also, Matth, 10:5, Mark 6:7).

After His resurrection, He gave instructions to spread the Gospel to all nations, and to baptize all those who would believe (Matth.28:19, Mark 16:15, Proph.Isaiah 66:19-21).

"***You are witnesses***" of the fact of salvation, He said, adding "***Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; however, tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high"*** (Luke 24:48-49).

Shortly before His Ascension, the Lord renewed this promise: "***But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*** (Acts 1:8). This opus was commenced by the Apostles on the very day of the Pentecost, which resulted in the "***addition***" to the Church of "***about three thousand souls***" (Acts 2:41), thus forming the Christian community of Jerusalem.

What was the characteristic sign that marked the first Christians? The Holy Bible says that it was the communion with the twelve Apostles: "***And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers***" as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:42), which also describe the brotherly communion of the first Christians, which even reached the point of their having "***all things in common***" (Acts 2:43-47)

This Apostolic communion, therefore, was the chief characteristic of the community of Jerusalem.

8. A visible communality

The first Church, which was founded in Jerusalem, was not an invisible one; it was a visible and specific community, which also included the emulation of Christ's holy virtues. The main characteristic was the Sunday gathering, with the "***breaking of bread***" (Acts 20:7) as its centre. Those who belonged to this specific community, who would participate in the Christian gatherings, was called - and actually was - a Christian; whoever did not belong, was not a Christian.

However, this Church - apart from the Apostles - also included other persons, who were given certain responsibilities, certain functions. They were the Presbyters (Elders) and the Deacons - or, as mentioned elsewhere - the Bishops (Overseers) and the Deacons (Philipp.1:1, 1 Timoth.5:17, Acts 20:28, e.a.). In other words, there was a specific hierarchy, which had been appointed - not by people, but by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28).

Just how visible and specific the Church was, is also proven by the existence of the Apostolic Council, which made specific decisions that were respected by everyone as being decisions of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:22-29). This Council was the mouth of the Church, which was the "***pillar***" and the "***ground***" of the Truth (1 Tim.3:15). So visible and specific was the Church, that among Her members were included the weak, and even the deceased (Matth.13:30 and 47, Jude 12, 1 Corinth.5:1 and 11), which, if left uncared for, would cause the members to be expelled (Jude 23).

9. The uninterrupted continuation of the Church

The Apostolic Church is not a simple episode that took place during the time of the Apostles; it was the event itself of the Church through the ages and until the coming of the Lord. The Paraclete - the Holy Spirit - continues to remain within the Church, "***forever***" (John 14:16), guiding the people to the Truth - that is, to Christ, Who is the "***Head of the Church***" - and will remain there, "***with them always, even to the end of the age***" (Matthew 28:20)

This Church subsequently presents an identity involving teaching, life and organization through the ages, and remains indestructible and unique (Matthew 16:18). This is a basic fact, and must be underlined specially, because there are people who doubt this, and instead believe in an invisible Church, with no visible continuation of the Apostolic era until this day.

The appointing of Apostles to be "***witnesses***" of Christ, "***to the end of the earth***" (Acts 1:8), the presence of Christ and of the Holy Spirit "***even to the end of the age***" (Matthew 28:20, John 14:15) and finally, the fact that the Church, in accordance with Christ's will, is indestructible and that "***the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it***" (Matthew 16:18) and is also the "***ground of the Truth***" (1 Tim.3:15) are proof that the uninterrupted continuation of the Church in the faith, the organization and the way of life, were the steadfast will of Christ and of the Apostles. As such, the Church cannot possibly become familiar with "chasms" and "interruptions" - not in Her faith, nor in Her organization or Her way of life. That is the true mark of the Church: the continuation of Her Apostolicity as well as these three things.

The "function" - for example - of the Apostles is not something that was merely mentioned in the Apostolic era; it was something that had to continue. Already, it was obvious in an Old Testament prophesy that the "position" (bishopric) of the traitor Judas was to be "taken" by another (Psalms 108:1-8), which is why we see the Apostles elect Matthias in Judas' place (Acts 1:26).

«***It is for this reason I left you in Crete***»,writes the Apostle Paul for example to Titus, «***so that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you***» (Titus 1:5). Then he goes on to designate the qualifications required for Presbyters, while elsewhere he mentions that the manner of their installation is ordination (1 Timothy 4:14). He in fact warns Timothy to be careful: "***do not lay hands on anyone hastily***" (1 Timothy 5:22) without previously examining if that person is suitable for that office.

10. The full revelation of the Church

The official inauguration of the Church took place on the day of the Pentecost during which the Apostles were baptised with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 2:4), where they felt the bond of communion and love with Christ and with the brethren to such a degree, that they began to publicly preach the Gospel of "in-Christ" salvation, without fear, which had as a result the addition of three thousand souls to the Church through holy baptism (Acts 2:41).

The full revelation of the Church however will take place on the final day, in the celestial Jerusalem, when the Bridegroom of the Church will have come and God's people - the Church - will have rediscovered their complete unity and complete communion with the Triune God. There will be no need then for Temples, because "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its Temple." (Rev.21:22) and the Church will be illuminated by the glory of God (Rev.21:9-27)

11. The true Church

Following all that we have mentioned, the question is now posed: Where is the Apostolic Church to be found today?

The true Church is found wherever there is the continuation of the Apostolic ministry of incorporating people into the Body of Christ; it is where one can witness Apostolic teaching, Apostolic organisation and the Apostolic way of life. The Apostolic Church is found there, where there are no "chasms" and "gaps" (Matth. 28:19-20).

Wherever there is a Bishop with the Apostolic teaching and the Apostolic authority; wherever he performs the Divine Eucharist and wherever the faithful commune and are rendered "as one body and of one blood" members of Christ, that is where the Apostolic Church can be found.

This is the reason that we Orthodox Christians believe the Apostolic Church is the Orthodox Church: because only She fully preserves the heritage of the Apostolic Church unadulterated and is its true continuation, without any "chasms" or "gaps" in Her history - from the time of the Apostles and through to this day.

12. The danger of heresy

Everything that has been mentioned reveals to us that those who distance themselves from the Orthodox Church - that is, from the worship gatherings of our Church, the Divine Liturgy - are in danger of losing their salvation.

Regarding those who abandon the Orthodox congregation for the sake of heretic gatherings, the word of God tells us: "***They departed from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have stayed with us; but they departed, so that it would be made manifest that not all of them were of us.***" (1 John 2:19).

It is for this reason that the Holy Bible exhorts us: "***I urge you, brethren, to note those who cause the divisions and the scandals contrary to what you have learnt; to steer away from them, for such do not***

serve our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly, and through smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." (Rom.16:17-18; cmp.2 Tim.4:3-4).

"***Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of the Lord and God, which He attended to with His own blood. For I know this: that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves, men will rise up, speaking perverse things in order to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone, night and day, with tears.***" (Acts 20:28-31).

13. "Hasten therefore to congregate more frequently..."

Saint Ignatius exhorts the Christians of Ephesus to thicken their eucharistic gatherings, and he uses words that reveal how important the Orthodox synaxis is for the Christians' salvation, with the performing of the Divine Eucharist:

"Hasten therefore to congregate more frequently for thanksgiving to God and for glorification. For when you do so more frequently, the powers of Satan are degraded and his devastation is undone, from within the concord of your faith." It is this therefore "concord of faith" - the unity of the faithful within the Church - that annihilates every conspiracy of Satan. And it is also why it is extremely dangerous for every Christian when he relaxes his bond with the Church, or - as Saint Ignatius mentions - when he is "away from the Altar", that is, far away from the unity of the Church whose centre is the holy Altar. "Let no-one deceive you. If someone is not found near the Altar, he is deprived of the Body of the Lord. Because, if the prayer of one or two people has such power, how much more power therefore is there, in the prayer of the Bishop and the entire Church?"

"Whoever does not come to the common gathering behaves egotistically and has condemned himself, because it is written that God is opposed to the proud (Proverbs 3:34, 1 Peter 5:5). Let us therefore be careful to not be opposed to the Bishop, so that we remain subservient to God."

Whoever does not partake in the life of the Church, whoever is not united with the bishop (who expresses the unity of the Church in liturgical life), is the one who is nurtured by "foreign sustenance" - even if that sustenance is presented to him in the name of Christ and in the spirit - supposedly - of the Holy Bible.

"I beseech you therefore" - writes Saint Ignatius to the Christians of Trallae of Lydia - "not I, but the love of Jesus Christ, to make use only of Christian sustenance and to avoid the foreign kind, which is heresy. There are people who mingle Jesus Christ with their personal delusions and seek to present them in a credible manner, just like those who offer a deadly poison mingled with honey and wine, whereby whoever does not know this, will take it and drink it with pleasure, but will also be drinking death along with it. Guard yourselves therefore from such people. You will achieve this, only if you do not become puffed up with egotism, when you remain inseparable from God, Jesus Christ and the bishop, and heed the instructions of the Apostles. Whoever is by the holy Altar, he is clean. He who is found away from the Altar - that is, he who acts independently of the Bishop, the presbyterium and the Deacons - he is not clean in his conscience."

Chapter 13 - The Sacred Trust of the Church

1. The genuine carriers of the trust

The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy that he should guard well the "***trust***" which was entrusted to him and avoid the "***profane and idle babblings and contradictions***" of the heretics (1 Tim.6:20).

"***Guard***" - he said - "***that good thing, which was committed to you, through the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us***" (2 Tim.1:14). The Apostle regards this opus so basic, that he adds that without this "***trust***", one is in danger of "***straying, concerning the faith***" (1 Tim.6:21). In these verses, we notice that Christ's salvific truth is not a "dry letter", which could be preserved by recording it in a book. This treasure was given by the Lord to the Apostles, so that those who would be joined to them would be guaranteed of having the truth. The Apostles assigned this opus to the bishops. It is furthermore obvious that bishops fulfil this Mission, provided they remain joined to the Body of Christ -the Church- in which acts the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13). In other words, when they don't express their own opinions, but the opinion of the Holy Spirit which is found within the Church (Acts 15:28, John 16:13, cmp. Psalms 81:1-8).

This is why Saint Ignatius - who sees in the person of the Bishop the guarantee of the Church's unity and the victory over the assaults of Satan and the delusion of heretics - characteristically says in his Epistle to Hebrews:

"***Because Jesus Christ - our true life - is the opinion of the Father, as are the Bishops who have been installed in all parts of the world who are of the same opinion as Jesus Christ (the in-Christ opinion). So, you too must also follow the opinion of the Bishop - which in fact you do - because the worthiness of the name of your Presbyter which is also worthy by God is linked to the bishop, like the strings are to the harp***."

With all the above it is proven that Christ's salvific truth can only be secured within the organic relations of the Church. When we speak of the organic relations with the Church, we mean the overall Church, or, as mentioned in our liturgical texts, the communion "with all of the Saints".

The "trust" therefore which the Apostle speaks of is not a book; it is the result of the perpetual presence of the Holy Spirit, Who leads to the full truth (John 16:13). It is life within the Church, Which comprises "the pillar and the ground of the truth (1 Tim.3:15). This ”trust" was delivered to the "saints" and it can only be received by those who are in communion with the "saints" (Jude 3). On the contrary, those who are not inside this communion are irreverent and heretic people, who do not possess the truth. This is what Jude's Epistle also testifies to, when he mentions that the author felt the need to write that Epistle "...***exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed..."*** (Jude 1:3-4).

When man is far from the Spirit of God Who works inside the Church, and is also far from the life of the Saints, he cannot quench his thirst because the "water and the Spirit" (John 3:5) which become the "inner source of water that springs forth unto eternal life" (John4:14) do not exist there. Even the very Bible cannot be comprehended correctly, outside the Church. Which is why this leads - not to salvation, but to perdition (2 Peter 3:16).

2. The Lord in relation to the Holy Bible

As known, Christ did not come in order to write the Holy Bible, nor did He write any book whatsoever. Christ became incarnate, He preached, He was crucified, He died and was resurrected; He completed the opus of man's salvation with His Church, which is none other than His own, God-human Body; He ascended into the heavens; He sent forth the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost. To His disciples He gave the instruction to go forth to all the nations and attract people to the faith and through Baptism render them members of the Church. But at the same time, He reassured them : "***I am with you always, even to the end of the age***" (Matthew 28:20) and that also with them would remain the Consoler forever (John 14:16), Who would lead them to Christ Himself (John 14:26, 15:26) - that is, to the fullness of the truth (John 16:13).

However, all these do not signify that Christ abolished the laws and the prophets of the Old Testament. On the contrary, He very frequently quotes them, in order to underline that their words were fulfilled in His person (Luke 4:21, John 5:38-39).

In other words, the true significance of the Holy Bible is not found in the letter, but in the Spirit, Who gives life to the letter (2 Cor. 3:6) and leads to the revealing of the Son and to the personal union with Him inside the Church.

The center, therefore, of the entire Holy Bible is the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament consists of the sacred books that preceded His incarnation, wherein is narrated the creation of the world and mankind, man's fall, Israel as the chosen people of God, their liberation from the bondage of the Egyptians, God's special Testament on Mount Sinai, the conquest of the Promised Land, the establishing of Kings, the Mission of Prophets, the Babylonian Captivity, the return from captivity and up until the era of Alexander the Great and his successors.

Beyond all these historical events, the entire Old Testament has as its centre God's promise regarding the coming of the Messiah, as well as the summoning of God's new people - that is, the Church.

In the Old Testament it is the Triadic God Who speaks; or, better still, it is the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, and He pre-announces through the mouth of the Prophets the event of man's salvation in the Person of Christ. The Apostle Peter says characteristically:

"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:10-12. cmp also 2 Peter 1:21).

However, the Old Testament constitutes the "***shadow***" of the New (Hebr.10:1). Its deeper meaning is found within a "***veil***" which only "***in Christ is taken away***" (2 Cor. 3:14) This is confirmed by the Lord Himself, Who told the Judeans that the Father had witnessed in the Old Testament regarding Christ, through the mouth of the Prophets, but that "***you do not have His word abiding in you, because the One***

whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; these testify of Me, but you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." (John 5:38-39).

The "new people" which the Holy Bible speaks of is no longer dependent on a certain nation, nor does it recognize any difference between nations and peoples (Rom.10:12-13, 1 Cor.12:13, Gal.3:28).

Consequently, if the core of the Old Testament is the expected Messiah and God's new people, we - in order to properly comprehend the deeper meaning of the Old Testament - need to examine it from the viewpoint of how it relates to that central purpose: to Christ and the Church. Differently, we will not be able to grasp the cardinal meaning of the Old Testament.

With regard to this matter, the Apostle Paul mentions that the law - that is, the Old Testament - was given as "... ***our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."*** (Gal.3:24). "***There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.***" (Gal. 3:28-29)

In the New Testament, God no longer speaks through the Prophets but "in the Son" - through the Person of the Son (Hebr.1:2)

Consequently, we cannot separate the Holy Bible from the Person of Christ. Otherwise, we would be in danger of turning the Holy Bible into a legal codex, which knows only cold paragraphs that anyone can interpret in their own manner. In other words, we are in danger of not moving on, to the life-giving Spirit, but remaining stuck to the letter and be condemned to death: "...***God, Who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."*** (2 Cor.3:6).

3. The place of the Apostles

Christ's disciples were given a specific Mission by the Lord, which they fulfilled in their lifetime: they preached, they catechized, they baptized those who believed, and they organized the spiritual life of the Churches that they founded.

During the time of their activity, and in order to respond to certain needs of the Christian communities (because it was not possible for them to be near them all the time), they wrote Epistles and other books, which they sent to certain Churches - to the heads of those Churches - or to other ecclesiastic personages. These books were collected at a later date and that is how the New Testament was formed.

The above are proof that the books of the New Testament were written for specific reasons, with the sole purpose of confronting certain needs of one or more local Churches (for example the Church of Corinth, the Church of Thessaloniki etc.) and were not intended to comprise books of the New Testament.

The fact is, these sacred authors conveyed the word of God to the Christian communities with those books, having written it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul's reassurance that "***every scripture is divinely inspired***" (2 Tim.3:16) does not only pertain to the books of the Old Testament, but for the entire Holy Bible.

4. The sole interpreter of the Holy Bible

Pursuant to the above, the following question is posed: Who is the authentic interpreter of the Holy Bible?

It is a basic requirement of each Christian that he be aware that the Holy Bible is not addressed to people who are scattered, but to the Christians who are assembled into one body - the Body of Christ. Consequently, the interpretation of the various books of the Holy Bible is the work of specialized people, who have been dedicated - by the Spirit of God - to be the shepherds of the Church. (Acts 20:28). Therefore it is not possible for just anyone to arbitrarily interpret the Holy Bible; the sole interpreter is the Holy Spirit, Who leads the Church (John 16:13, 14:26) and renders Her "***the pillar and the ground of the truth***" (1 Tim. 3:15). In this way - that is, inside the Church - the Holy Bible continues to be the eternal word of God, which regenerates and saves. It is not a human word; it is God's word, which had been uttered by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those sacred authors. In order to correctly comprehend the divine word, that immense gift by God, we need to have "***the mind of Christ***" (1 Cor. 2:16) and have "***the Spirit Who is from God***" (1 Cor.2:12). The Spirit of God must reside within us (1 Cor.6:19); however, this is possible, only inside the Church (1 John 2:18-28)

The Apostle Paul told the Ephesians that he prayed to God on his knees, "... ***that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*** (Ephesians 3:14-21)

When distanced from the Church - from the Body of Christ - the truths of the Holy Bible remain incomprehensible and are misinterpreted. "***For who of man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God***." (1 Cor.2:11-12) The sole therefore interpreter of the Holy Bible is the Holy Spirit. Everything that Christ said and did, is taught and interpreted correctly, by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26).

When the Holy Bible is distanced from the Spirit of God, it becomes nothing more than a "dry letter" for mankind. And, because every person interprets every word differently, they reach their own conclusions, which do not coincide with the conclusions of others, nor with the true meaning of the Holy Bible - which exists in the Church. The heretics' mistake is not that they study the Holy Bible, but that they isolate it from the life of the Church and thus are unable to interpret it correctly.

In Paul's Epistles - the Apostle Peter tells us - as in the rest of the books of the Holy Bible, "t***here are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked***." (2 Peter 3:16-17).

When we isolate the Holy Bible from the Church, God's written word is left with no steadfast basis for us humans. Because, who would then reassure us of the divinely inspired status of those books of the New Testament which were not authored by the disciples of the Lord? For example, there is the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, **which the Church included** among the books of the New Testament, albeit Luke was not a disciple of the Lord.

But we know that these books are not without a stable foundation: It was the Church, Who designated the books of the Holy Bible. And She did this, based on the presence of God's Spirit, Who leads the Church to the truth (John 16:13, 1 Tim. 3:15).

All of the above also prove something else to us: That without the Church, we would not have the New Testament - that is, the Holy Bible - today.

The Church, therefore, is something far broader than the Holy Bible, and we cannot confine Her to writings only. It is because the Church is Christ Himself and the life of the Church is the very life of Christ - Christ's entire life, not just a segment of it (cmp. John 21:25). This life of Christ, therefore, and His entire opus is delivered both in writing (Holy Bible) as well as unwritten tradition within the Church.

Whoever denies the Church, cannot claim: "I have the word of God".

5. The sacred Tradition of the Church

The faithful Christian who lives the life of the Church, participates in the living and perpetual experience of the Church. We are referring to the sacred memory of the Church, in which the truth - the message of man's salvation - has been preserved. Here, we are not talking about the memory or the experience of an individual, but about the living faith and the conscience of the entire Church, Which remains stable and unchanging throughout the ages (1 Tim.3:15, Matth. 16:18). And we are not talking about a personal opinion, but about a universal witness. This witness is referred to as "Sacred Tradition" by our Church.

When addressing the Corinthians, the Apostle characteristically said:

"***clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life***." (2 Cor.3:3-6).

Here, therefore, it is not about "***teaching as doctrines the commandments of men***" (Matth.15:9, Isaiah 29:13) - which are condemned by the Lord because they "***lay aside God's commandment***" (Mark 7:8); it is about an "***epistle of Christ*** [...] ***written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God,*** [...] ***on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart***", of the faithful. (2 Cor.3:3). In other words, it is about the "sacred memory" of the Church, whose purity and clarity is guaranteed by the Spirit of God (John 16:13).

The aforementioned reveal that the Holy Bible does not contain the entire opus of the Lord (John 21:25) and every kerygma of the Apostles.

John the Apostle writes characteristically: "***Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full."*** (2 John12, also 3 John 13-14 and 1 Cor.11:34).

The Apostle Paul writes the following to Timothy: "***Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.***" (2 Tim.1:13).

Also: "***You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."*** (2 Tim.2:1-2)

He addresses the same exhortation to the Christians of Thessaloniki (2 Thess.2:15) and he praises the Corinthians for keeping the traditions exactly as they had received them from him (1 Cor. 11:2).

The kerygma, therefore, of the Church was always based on the "sacred memory" of the Church (cmp. also, Luke 1:2-4); that is, on the basis of the overall "in-Christ" truth.

The above helps us to comprehend that the criterion of this sacred tradition is the Church Herself. In other words, it is possible to discern between what the experience of the Church and sacred tradition are - as opposed to the opinions of people - and what the salvific truth is (which remains eternally unchanging and binding for all) - as opposed to what is passing and changing - only on the basis of the universal experience of the Church

In view of this, the Holy Bible on its own is not "complete", inasmuch as it also includes many passing elements (for example, the number seven in Acts 6:3 (***Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business***); the order of widows in 1 Timothy 5:9 (***Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless...);*** the covering of the women's heads in 1 Corinthians 11:5 (***But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved***) and the washing of others' feet despite the Lord's commandment in John 13:14 (***If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.***), which have not been observed in practice by the Church. In the continuing life of the Church, we do not only discern between what the sacred tradition is, to which we must remain steadfast (2 Thess.2:15) and what the "***commandments of men***" are (Matth.15:9, Isaiah 29:13) which we should avoid, but also discern between what is eternal and what is temporary.

In this way, the Church always remains steadfast upon Her original foundations; She safeguards Her own identity and preserves the unity of Her faith through the ages, in accordance with the Lord's will. (John 17:20-21)

We need to pay special attention to this last detail, because it helps us to understand why the heresies that did not keep the sacred tradition of the Church have split up and have not retained any unity amongst themselves, whereas Orthodox Christians, albeit having lived apart externally on account of political situations, remained united in the faith and the way of life.

The dogmas which were formulated by the Church in the Ecumenical Councils were not personal opinions of the Fathers who participated in them; they were the experience of the Saints of our Church, who were

Christ-bearers and spirit-bearers (1 Cor. 2:16). The Fathers of the Councils partook of that experience also, given that they also partook of the common body of the Church.

Thus, when we refer to Orthodoxy's sacred tradition, we do not see it as something that belongs to the past and as such, its place should be in a museum; we regard it to be the living word of God - Who is forever inside the Church - and that it is addressed to every person of every era, with the aim to animate him.

In other words, Sacred Tradition is that very life-giving presence and energy of the Holy Spirit within the Church, thanks to Whom the Church can interpret the divine revelation with authority, and be led to the possession of the full truth (John 16:13, 1 Tim. 3:15).

For this reason, they who deny the tradition of the Church, also deny Her divine nature; that is, the Church Herself. They furthermore deny - as we have seen - the very Bible itself, because the Holy Bible is the written trust of the Church, and only inside the Church does it find its safe support and its authentic interpretation (cmp.also 2 Peter 3:16-17).

Chapter 14 - Man's Incorporation in the Church

1. The birth from above

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Christ said that for one to become a partaker of God's Kingdom, he must be "***born above***" (John 3:3).

Nicodemus was not able to understand Christ's words, so he asked Him: "***How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"***

Jesus then replied: ***"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born above'."*** (John 3:4-7. cmp. also, John 1:12-13).

The birth "above" that Christ spoke of is the "***washing of regeneration and renewing***" (Titus 3:5) - that is, Holy Baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity.

"***Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'***" (Acts 2:37), to which He replied:

"***Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit***" (Acts 2:38).

The presence, therefore, of the Holy Spirit renders man "born again". This presence is secured within the Church, with the Sacrament of Baptism and the other Sacraments. These holy Sacraments are visible acts, which are performed by the Church and are witnessed objectively, with external criteria and not with subjective - supposedly spiritual - criteria as some heretics maintain.

Baptism was not an arbitrary act by the Apostles. They had received a special instruction by Christ (Matth.28:19), Who had reassured them that those who would believe and be baptized would be saved, whereas, on the contrary, those who would not believe would be condemned (Mark 16:16).

With Baptism, man is assumed into the body of Christ; he is incorporated in the resurrected Body of the Lord. Thus, when he is submerged three times into the water of the baptismal font, he is participating in the Lord's 3-day sojourn in Hades. And when he emerges from the water, the old nature of Adam has been mortified inside him and he has embosomed the new nature: Christ's resurrected nature (Romans 6:3-9). He is no longer a citizen of earth, destined to die. He is thereafter naturalized in heaven, and his name has been added among those of the living (Hebr.12:23). Because of this (and provided we could see that person with a clear, spiritual glance as he emerges from the sacred Font), we would be able to perceive the change and the metamorphosis he has undergone with that Sacred Sacrament. We would discern that he has shed the "old person" with his Baptism and has put on the resurrected and transformed Body of Christ and has been reborn - spiritually, that is. (John 3:4-7, 1:12-13).

The Apostle Paul describes this fact, as follows: "***Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him***..." (Rom. 6:3-8).

2. The prerequisites for Baptism

According to Christ's words, salvation belongs to the one who will believe and be baptized (Mark 16:16). The prerequisite, therefore, for baptism, is to believe in the Person of Christ.

When we say that one must believe, we do not mean any abstract belief in Him - that is, a faith that does not cost us anything, in the precise manner that some claim: "I believe there is a higher power"!

This is about the faith, for whose sake man must be prepared to offer everything - even his very life, if asked of him. That is what the martyrs of our Church did, and that is what we are called upon to do: to regard our faith as the most precious thing in our life, which we do **not** give up, either in exchange for money or for human friendships - not even for our very life (cmp. Matth.16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, John12:25)

This faith mainly includes three points:

a) **Renouncing Satan**. Distancing oneself from every satanic belief, thought and act (James 4:7).

This of course cannot be successfully achieved by man on his own, because he is under the dominion of Satan (1 John 5:19, John 12:31 and 14:13). For this reason, the Church exorcises the evil spirit prior to the sacrament of holy Baptism in the name of Christ, so that it exit and distance itself from the "newly-conscripted soldier of Christ our Lord" who is sealed with the sign of the Precious Cross, never to return to him, ever again.

With the seal of the Precious Cross, Satan is also exorcised to depart from the water of the holy Baptism, so that it may prove to be "water of redemption, water of sanctification, the cleansing of flesh and spirit, the bath of regeneration, the renovation of the spirit, the gift of adoption, the garment of incorruptibility, the fount of life", and so that the one being baptized be reborn in it, after having shed the old person of corruptibility and donned the new one - the one being "renovated, according to the image of the One Who created him", so that he become "congenital" with the death and the resurrection of Christ.

b) **Siding with Christ**. That is, the about-face of one's thoughts, actions, love - one's entire life - towards Christ; one's complete subordination to Him. (James 4:7)

c) **Venerating and worshipping Christ.**

3. Infant Baptism

In the ancient Church, when people became Christians individually, they were baptized at an adult age, after being catechized previously and having believed in Christ.

Towards this end, the Church had formed a special order: the Order of Catechumens. We can still discern this order in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy today. Its first section, which includes the "pacific" prayers, the antiphons and the readings and ends with the blessings for the catechumens, is called the "Liturgy of the Catechumens".

The above of course do not signify that in the ancient Church, young children or even infants were excluded from holy Baptism. That would have signified their exclusion from salvation (John 3:5). Christ Himself had called out to the children, laid His hands upon them, blessed them, imparted the grace of the Holy Spirit, and in fact proclaimed that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them (Matth.19:14-15, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17).

When entire families came to the faith, the Apostles baptized all the members of those families, without exception (Acts 16:15, 1 Cor.1:15).

We could also characteristically mention that in the Holy Bible, circumcision is presented as a form of Baptism (Col. 2:11-12). Furthermore, it is a known fact that circumcision took place on the eighth day after the birth of the child. (Gen.17:12, Lev.12:3). This is why it appears that infant baptism was the customary practice in the ancient Church, whereas the postponement of baptism is a later practice. Irenaeus (150 A.D.) witnessed this practice of the Church, while Saint Cyprian (250 A.D.) notes: "*If adults - who, prior to their Baptism had fallen into serious crimes - are made worthy of the grace of Baptism, then how much more should children be made worthy of the grace of Baptism, when they voluntarily did not sin, but only partake of the original sin which was foreign to their will?*"

Saint Gregory the Theologian also adds that children should be baptized when they are still infants, so that "they be sanctified and dedicated from their infancy".

4. The importance of personally participating during Holy Baptism

Of course, one may well ask: Can a child understand the holy Sacrament?

On this question, we need to point out that understanding the sacrament is not dependent on the intellectual capacity of a person, but on God's love.

"We did not seek Him; He sought us" says Nicholas Kavasilas **(*)** and adds that the sheep did not seek out the shepherd, but rather, the shepherd sought out the sheep. Nor did the coin look for the master of the house; the master of the house went looking for the coin. Everything originates from God. Man is merely the recipient of the energies of God's grace, without any conscious reaction of his own.

This however applies to a young child also, and in fact, in a much better way, because the child is not in a position to extend any conscious reaction to God's grace. Naturally a child's conscious participation and perceptive ability is lesser, but this is not significant, because even in an adult, the perceptive ability is by far not analogous, with regard to the incomprehensible and ineffable result of the holy sacrament.

These are the reasons the Orthodox Church baptizes infants and believes that it is the correct praxis and is the will of Christ (Matth.19:14-15).

5. The huge responsibility of the parents and the godparents

It is obvious that in the case of infant baptism, the responsibility for the catechizing and the incrementing of the faith in a new member of the Church is borne by the Christian parents and the godparent.

What does that responsibility consist of? What does the godparent or the catechumen promise, in the event that Baptism takes place at an advanced age, as is the case in Missionary lands? The answer to this question is provided by the sacred service for the Catechumen, which takes places prior to Holy Baptism. The priest turns the catechumen to face the West and asks him/her if he/she renounces Satan; if he/she renounces everything that has to do with Satan, with his works and his worship.

The catechumen publicly certifies three times that he/she renounces Satan. In this way, he/she enters a sacred contract with God and the Church, that he/she has renounced everything related to Satan and his works.

«I have renounced! » he/she repeats three more times.

The priest then prompts the catechumen or the godparent to an act replete with symbolism:

«And blow and spit upon him! ».

The catechumen then puffs and spits three times towards the West. In this way, he/she proclaims that not only has he/she renounced everything to do with Satan's evil works, but also feels disgust and abhorrence for everything that has to do with Satan - in fact, to such a degree that he/she spits him in the face!

The priest then turns the catechumen towards the East and again asks him/her three times:

«Do you stand with Christ? », - are you on Christ's side?

The catechumen then gives his/her official assurance three times that he/she is willing to be enumerated among the members of Christ's Body - the Church:

«I do stand by! »

"Have you stood by Christ?" the priest again asks him/her three times. And he/she again gives the same assurance three times: "I have stood by!"

And this beautiful and moving dialogue between the priest and catechumen or the godparent continues. Now the Priest must ascertain whether the catechumen has become rooted in the Orthodox Faith. So, he asks:

«And do you believe in Him? ».

Then the catechumen declares: «I believe in Him as King and God». I believe Him to be my king and my God! (cmp.John 20:28).

However, details are required of the catechumen on the matter of faith. He/she must provide more guarantees that his/her faith is specific, and that it includes all the dogmas of the Orthodox Church, as formulated by the Ecumenical Councils. For this reason, he/she must then recite the Symbol of Faith (the Creed) and in fact, in a voice loud enough to be heard by the entire congregation in the Church, with whom he/she is "signing" that holy contract. In this way he/she proves in the presence of God's people that his/her faith is the faith of the Orthodox Church; in other words, the faith in the one, Triune God and in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which includes the confession of "one baptism, for the absolution of sins", the anticipation of the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come.

So, one renounces Satan, then confesses to stand by Christ and confesses the Orthodox faith. Afterwards follows the worship of the Triune God, the complete submission to His will, and the full dependence on His mercy:

«Then submit to Him! ».

«I submit to Father, Son and Holy Spirit - the Trinity - of one and inseparable essence!!» (cmp. James 4:7).

All of the above are proof of the immense responsibility of the parents and the godparents, when they entrust their children to the Church and receive them from the Sacred Baptismal Font. As mentioned, they sign a sacred contract and they promise that they will catechize their children in the Orthodox faith and will gradually introduce them into the full life of the Church. How immense indeed is this responsibility!

After having signed this contract with the Church, and prior to proceeding to the performance of the holy Sacrament of Baptism, the priest glorifies the name of God for this important event:

«Blessed is God, Who desires everyone to be saved and to be acquainted with the Truth, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages! ».

The service closes with the beautiful blessing by the priest, in which he beseeches God to invite the catechumen "towards holy illumination" and make him worthy of the great gift of the Holy Spirit:

«Remove from him the oldness and make him new in the eternal life, filling him with the strength of Your Holy Spirit that he may be joined to Your Christ, so that he will no longer be a child of sin but a child of Your Kingdom».

6. The support of the Church

However, the parents and the godparents are not left alone in their upholding of their sacred promise. To their aid comes the Orthodox parish in which they belong, with its liturgical life and its catechistic and other opportunities that it provides for its new members. Then there is the Orthodox school, which provides the children with a systematic catechesis. Finally, we have the Orthodox children's book and the Orthodox magazine, both of which are valuable assistants in the opus of catechesis and the introduction of youngsters into the life of the Church.

All of these, and especially the support of the Church, do not constitute an interference in the duties of the parents; on the contrary, parents who guide their children to baptism are declaring with this act of theirs that they desire to introduce their children into the life of the Church, which is the life of the in-Christ community and not a piety that is private to each person separately. For this reason, if they should keep them away from the liturgical and catechistic life of the Church, they will be transgressing the Sacred promise that they gave God and the Church, when they led their children to Holy Baptism.

Parents and godparents have thus become - as we have seen - guarantors, so that an infant will be embraced by the Church with its baptism. Consequently, they are obliged to make sure in every possible way to introduce the new member of the Church into the whole life of the Church. If they do not prompt it to participate in the catechist activity of the parish, or lead it themselves to the Church, they perjure themselves before God and before the Church. This is the conclusion that the beautiful and touching Service of the Catechumen leads to.

7. The armor of the Holy Spirit

With Holy Baptism, man enters into the body of Christ - that is, into the Church - and he becomes a participant in the new creation. But, as Christ mentioned to Nicodemus, man must be born "of water and Spirit" (John 3:5). Elsewhere, he said that "***On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"*** Then the Evangelist added: "***But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, Whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."*** (John 7:37-39; Isaiah 55:1).

We know that this was fulfilled, on the Day of the Pentecost, during which the Apostles "***were all filled with the Holy Spirit***" (Act 2:4).

However, the Spirit comes separately to each person, through the sacred mystery of Chrismation and animates him.

The Holy Bible testifies that baptism is not enough for a person to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit. For example, we see the Apostles Peter and John going to Samaria in order to place their hands upon the heads of the Christians to impart the Holy Spirit to them (Acts 8:15-17). The same is done by the Apostle Paul with the Christians of Ephesus (Acts 19:5-7). "***In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of***

truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance..." (Eph.1:13-14., cmp 1 John 2:20).

With Baptism, therefore, man is joined to Christ; he participates in the death of Christ and in the resurrection of Christ. But the sacred chrismation - the seal of the Holy Spirit as the Apostle says - is what constitutes the "promise" (Eph.1:14, 2 Cor.1:22) and the beginning of the Kingdom of God. This participation of man in the divine way of life is complete, with the Divine Eucharist.

The Orthodox Church always regards these three sacred Mysteries as an inner unity, which is why She doesn't deprive anyone, not even infants, of them.

«*You, Who now also has deigned to regenerate Your neophyte servant with water and with spirit, and Who has granted him forgiveness of the sins he has committed, voluntarily or involuntarily*», mentions the blessing of holy chrismation, «*You, therefore, o Lord and merciful King of all, grant to this one the seal of the gift of the Holy and omnipotent and venerated Spirit as well as the communion of the Holy Body and the precious Blood of Your Christ. Preserve him within Your sanctification, secure him within the Orthodox faith. Redeem him from the wily one and all his tricks; preserve his soul in purity and righteousness through his salvific fear of You, so that he may please You with his every word and work, and become a son and an inheritor of Your heavenly Kingdom*».

The «Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit» therefore creates the prerequisites of the faithful's struggle against the powers of the evil one. Man needs to feel that "salvific fear" of God and preserve himself within "purity and righteousness" in order to please God "with his every work and word" and thus be rendered a "son and inheritor of the heavenly Kingdom". This is why we said that holy chrismation is a "betrothal" to this Kingdom.

For man to succeed in overcoming Satan - who comes and assaults him after his baptism - it is imperative that he makes all his strengths available (physical and spiritual) for that struggle. The whole person needs to be sanctified and be sealed, as property hereafter of God, and as a domicile, a Temple, of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.3:16-17, 6:19, Ezek.32:26-27).

This is the reason that the Orthodox Church seals all the members of our body by anointing them with Holy Myrrh: so that it imparts to the whole person the gifts of the Holy Spirit and render him fully a "charismatic being", ready for his new life "in Christ". It is the holy armor with which the Church enrobes Her every new member (cmp.Ephes.6:10-18).

8. The assaults of the enemy after Baptism

Through baptism, therefore, man is reborn completely and - as the blessings of the holy mystery say - Christ takes shape inside him. The person is "edified" and is "grafted" into the Church and is clothed with the "garment of incorruptibility" and a "radiant cloak".

But the question is posed: If Satan has departed from the heart of a man, never to return to him again - given that the person has been reborn and Christ Himself dwells inside him - then how is it possible for him to sin after his baptism?

The Fathers of the Church say that the devil departs from a person during Baptism, but continues to assault him externally, through his senses which give birth to passions.

That is why the Church prays during the sacred Mystery of Baptism that the Lord will reassure the neophyte in the Orthodox faith, protect him from the evil one and from all the tricks of the devil, and to render him an "invincible warrior" in the face of the powers of evil.

9. Christ's warrior

These assaults of Satan testify that after Baptism, the person enters a spiritual arena and is called upon for the rest of his life to fight against the powers of darkness, which use man's senses in order to give birth to various passions inside him and in that way, find their way back into that person's heart and murder him spiritually.

"***Finally, my brethren"*** says the Apostle***, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."*** (Ephes.6:10-13). "***Child, if you come to be subject to the Lord, prepare your soul for testing***" says the Holy Bible (Wisdom of Sirach 2:1).

Salvation is, of course, a "***gift of God***" (Ephes.2:8, 1 Cor.3:7), and is dependent on God's mercy (Rom.9:16); however, man must "***open the door***" (Rev.3:20), we must become God's collaborators (cmp. 1 Cor.3:8) and toil for our salvation "***with fear and trembling***" (Philip.2:12).

That which man is therefore called upon to offer is his volition, his sweat and his labour, as well as his fear and trembling. "***For without the presence of one's volition, not even God will do anything***", Saint Macarius the Egyptian had characteristically said. And Abba Isaiah added that although God may grant vvirtues, man is nevertheless called upon to offer on his part the sweat of his every virtue. "***Woe to timid hearts and to slack hands... woe to you, who have lost endurance***" says the wise Sirach (Wisdom of Sirach 2:12 and14). "For also, without pains the soul cannot attain praxis and theory", says a hymn of the Great Canon characteristically.

The volition therefore of a person who yearns for his salvation must be translated as a spiritual struggle for vanquishing his passions and his personal volition, for the purpose of subjugating himself completely to God's will and opening wide the portal of his soul so that the Saviour Christ might enter it. (Rev.3:20)

This is the reason the Orthodox Church underlines the immense importance that ascesis has in the life of every person. "***Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him!..."*** says the Apostle Peter (1 Pet.5:8-9; cmp. Ephes.6:10-13).

Danger therefore exists, even after holy Baptism, and every Christian is called upon to prove himself an "invincible warrior" opposite the offenses and the machinations of the adversary and always keep in mind the words of the Lord: "***When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked***

than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." (Matth.12:43-45).

We must therefore take care; in case this happens to all of us.

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(*) Nicholas Cabasilas (Greek: Νικόλαος Καβάσιλας; born 1319/1323 in Thessalonica; died after 1391) was a Byzantine mystic and theological writer. Cabasilas is a saint within the Orthodox Church. His feast day is June 20. He was on intimate terms with the emperor John VI Cantacuzene, whom he accompanied in his retirement to a monastery. In 1355 he succeeded his uncle Nilus Cabasilas, like himself a determined opponent of the union of the Orthodox and Latin churches, as archbishop of Thessalonica. In the Hesychast controversy he took the side of the monks of Mount Athos and Saint Gregory Palamas. His chief work is his, "On the Life in Christ" (Περὶ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς). in which he lays down the principle that union with Christ is affected by the three great mysteries of baptism, chrismation, and the eucharist. He also wrote homilies on various subjects, and a speech against usurers, printed with other works in Migne, Patrologia Graeca, c. i. A large number of his works is still extant in manuscript. Cabasilas' major works are Life in Christ and Commentary on the Divine Liturgy. These works display a profound understanding of the sacramental and liturgical life of the Eastern Orthodox Church and are accessible to and instructive for any Christian today worshiping in either the East or West.

Chapter 15 - The Place of the Laity in the Church

1. The regal priesthood

God had chosen Israel, to make it His "***chosen people... a royal priesthood and a holy nation***" (Exod.19:5-6). Through the mouth of Isaiah, He said "...***you shall be called priests of the Lord, ministers of God...***" (Isaiah 61:6)

"***Say to my daughter Sion: 'See, your Savior comes to you, having his own reward and his work before him.' And he shall call it a holy people, redeemed by the Lord, and you shall be called 'A City Sought After and Not Forsaken***.' " (Isaiah 62:11-12).

These testimonies of the Old Testament which refer to God's chosen people are invaluable, because they are a fore impression of the place of God's new people - that is, of Christians. This is because the people of Israel are a depiction of the Church (cmp. Gal.4:21-31, Rom.4:1-25, 9:6-8)

"***You also" -*** says the Apostle Peter characteristically ***- "as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ***." (1 Pet.2:5)

These passages do not refer to a certain class of Christians, but to all the faithful who comprise the spiritual edifice of the Church, with Christ Himself - our first-born brother - as Her cornerstone and head (Eph.1:22, 5, Col.1:18)

Christ is the "***ruler over the kings of the earth***", Who ***"has made us kings and priests to His God and Father"*** (Rev.1:5-6) so that we might "***reign on the earth***" (Rev.5:10).

All the above testify to the uppermost honour - but also the huge responsibility - of every faithful in the Church. A unique honour and responsibility!

2. A Priest, over one's own body

A faithful Christian is a Priest to his own body and to his entire existence. He is called upon to offer himself and all of his works as sacrifice to God and - along with them - all of Creation, upon which he was placed by God as its ruler (Gen.1:28-30). "***I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service***" says the Apostle Paul (Rom.12:1)

Man's entire life becomes a perpetual sacrifice to God - a perpetual Divine Liturgy.

A man of God ceases to think and act selfishly, with his own calculations and personal interest at his core - the way the first-fashioned people acted when they fell into the devil's tempting proposal. Man, once again places God's will and the Lord's glory at his core. (1 Cor.6:20).

Each Christian's personal life becomes a continuous testimony of God's presence and activity within man, so that should anyone examine his way of life, one will effortlessly come to the conclusion that Christ lives inside him; that he is not a conventional person but rather, a citizen of God's kingdom. His works and his entire life thus become a perpetual divine Liturgy, thus re-acquiring their first meaning, which they had in God's Paradise. (Matth.5:16, 1 Cor.10:31)

When man processes Nature, when he discovers and subjugates Nature's powers, when he transforms everything around him, he no longer does it for his own sake but does it for his brethren and - subsequently - he offers them, through them, to Christ, as thanks. (Proverbs 19:17, Matth.25:40, 2 Cor. 9:12-15).

«***And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ***» (Coloss. 3:23-24).

In the Holy Bible there are many passages that mention how mercy and practiced love towards brethren precede every other expression of worship and in fact, that without them, the worship of God is rendered futile. (Hos.6:6, 1 Kings 15:22, Matth.9:13, 5:23-24, Mark 11:25, James 1:27, 2:15 e.a.).

The Prophet Isaiah refers to true fasting and underlines the glorifying significance of one's offering to a brother:

«***Break your bread with the one who is hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; if you see one naked, clothe him, and you shall not neglect any of the relatives of your seed. Then your light shall***

break forth early in the morning, and your healings shall rise quickly, and your righteousness shall go before you, and the glory of God shall cover you. Then you shall cry out, and God will listen to you; while you are still speaking, he will say, Here I am.» (Isaiah 58:7-9)

Man, thus offers his goods, the fruits of his labours, as thanks to God - as for example the bread and the wine for the Divine Eucharist: «Thine own of Thine own do we offer Thee, of everything and for everything! » Bread and wine are gifts of God and at the same time are the fruits of man's labours. This labour therefore is what man offers as a sacrifice to God, through his brethren (Proverbs 19:17, Matth.25:40).

Says the Prophet David: «...***because all things are yours and of your own have, we given you, because we are resident aliens before you and live as resident aliens, like all our fathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no endurance. Lord, our God, all this abundance that I have made ready, so that a house to your holy name be built, is from your hand, and all things belong to you***...» (1 Chron.29:14-16).

This place of man within Creation reveals to us that the reborn person cannot ever be against progress and science. What he is called upon to avoid - at all cost - is the devil's temptations in our day and age - that is, the selfish use of Creation and the powers of God's Creation. Man is not called upon to return to a way of life that is characteristic of a rural society; he is obliged to utilize all of his powers to contribute towards the progress of Science and technique. At the same time however, he is called upon to infuse all of his works with the Spirit of God and to render them all a source of glorification of God's Name. (1 Cor.6:20).

«***Take heed for yourself lest you forget the Lord your God, so as not to keep his commandments and his judgments and his statutes, which I command you today. Lest, when you have eaten and been filled and, having built fine houses and lived in them, and when your oxen and sheep have multiplied and when silver and gold have been multiplied to you and when all that you own has been multiplied to you, you become exalted in heart and forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a house of slavery, who led you through that great and fearsome wilderness, where there was a biting snake and a scorpion and thirst, where there was no water, who brought out for you from flint rock a spring of water, who fed you with manna in the wilderness that your fathers did not know so that he might distress you and test you, that you might do well at your end. Do not say in your heart, "My strength and the mastery of my hand have produced for me this great power." And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you strength to produce power—and so that he may uphold his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as today***» (Deuter.8:11-18. Cmp. also 11:16).

3. A Priest, over God's Creation

The aforementioned also reveal that man feels himself as responsible for God's Creation and once again hearkens to God's voice, which places him in Paradise with the instruction to toil in it and to place it at the service of the brethren - in other words, to make him an instrument for the glorification of God (Gen.2:15).

Spiritual man - the man of New Creation, who is anointed a king and a son of the Kingdom - is no longer at a distance from God's Creation. He has found his proper place in it: the place that Adam had, prior to his fall.

«If one attains cleansing», according to the maxims of the desert Fathers, «everything will we subjugated to him, as they were to Adam when he was in Paradise, before he transgressed God's commandment» (Paul). And saint Isaac the Syrian adds that the faith in God by the righteous one "transforms the beasts of the forest into harmless lambs».

This regal and hieratic authority of man over God's other creations, and his deep sense of responsibility towards them, can be seen in the lives of the Saints of our Church. The sacred Book of Saints (the "Synaxarion") for example contains the following, touching incident pertaining to the blessed Hossios Koprios:

«Once when he had ascended the mountain together with the Monastery's donkey to cut and collect wood in the forest, a bear attacked and wounded the donkey's hindquarters. The blessed Koprios then ordered the bear to remain still and loaded the wood onto its back instead, saying "I will not set you free yet, but instead, because you wounded it, you will undertake the donkey's chore from now on, until it is completely healed!" The bear submitted to his command and thereafter carried the wood». We see here how the man of God reigns supreme once again among the animals; naturally not in any arbitrary manner and for personal and selfish reasons, but in order to impose order and harmony in God's Creation.

Also, characteristic is the following incident from the life of Anthony the Great, as narrated by his disciples to Saint Hilarion during a visit to the orchard of the Saint's monastery:

«When our blessed Father Anthony had originally planted those trees, wild animals would cause serious damages whenever they came to the nearby river to drink, by also trampling over his garden. One time, when the saint spotted them coming, he took a stick and approached one of the animals (which appeared to be the protector of the others) and ordered it to leave. And - oh, the miracle! - the beast stood still in its tracks, the saint tapped its sides with the stick very humbly, saying: "Why are you wronging me, who has not in the least wronged you? Why are you eating the fruits for which you did not toil? Leave, therefore, and do not ever enter this orchard again!" Thus, he spoke, and from that moment on, they never again entered the orchard, but would only drink water from the river and leave».

4. A proclaimer of God's Kingdom

«***...but you go, and preach the kingdom of God***», as Christ tells us (Luke 9:60). A Christian's entire life becomes a cause for God's name to be glorified among mankind (Matth.5:16, 1 Cor.10:31, 1 Pet.2:11-12) - namely, so that those who are not in the Church might come to the upright faith. Thus, a Christian's life becomes judgment for the world and a call for awareness of the truth.

«Go forth and teach all nations! » (Matth.28:19), Christ had said. Our Church has set down that this excerpt be recited during the Mystery (sacrament) of Holy Chrismation. This has been thus decided, for the purpose of declaring that this calling by Christ is addressed to every baptized Christian. Christ did not come in order to save a certain number of "elect" - as asserted by certain people who are deluded. He came for the salvation of all people (1 Tim.2:4). All people are invited to become sons of Christ's heavenly kingdom. Therefore, if we desire that the Lord's will be done, we must toil for the salvation of our brethren. «***And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd***» (John 10:16, Cmp.Isaiah 66:19).

Each and every Christian must «***always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you***»; however, as the Apostle says, you must do it «***with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed***» (1 Peter 3:15-16). «***Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one***» (Coloss.4:6).

To the faithful, there is only one who constitutes certain hope: Christ (2 Cor.1:6; Tit.1:2-3; 1 John 3:3). Apart from Christ, there is no hope for mankind (see 1 Thess.4:13, Ephes.2:12). Therefore, how can a faithful Christian be indifferent and not strive to spread the only hope to as many other people as possible? This opus is not simply the will of God; it is also the best possible proof of our love for God (see 1 John 3:17, 4:7-8 and 20; Ezek.3:16-21, 33:1-20). It is furthermore a witness of the genuineness of the upright faith and the Christian way of life. If we remain steadfast in that unique hope, we become inflamed with the desire for the salvation of our brethren and are unable to rest while people who are around us - our brethren - are still dwelling in indifference and in delusion, and are left outside that hope.

«***Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins***», says the Apostle James (James 5:19-20. cmp also 1:5, Luke 15:24, 32).

The salvation therefore of a brother who is in utmost danger does not allow for any postponement and indifference. «From our neighbour is life and death», says Abba Antonios, «for if we win our brother, we win God» (cmp. Ezek.3:16-21, 33:1-20).

If we remain indifferent, this signifies that we perhaps lack the courage to confess, or that this hope is not solidly founded inside us.

In the first case, we need to recall the words of the Lord, Who says that He will confess before the Father each one of us who confesses Him before people, whereas He will deny the ones who do not have the courage to confess Him or who deny Him before people (see Matth. 10:32-33; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26, 12:8-9, 2 Timoth.2:12). In the second case, we need always keep in mind the words in the Book of Revelations: «***I could wish you were either cold or hot. But, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth***» (Revel.3:16).

Characteristic are the words of Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow on this matter: «If you refuse to be taught and to teach, you are not a disciple of the Lord. What are you then? I do not know, just as I also do not know what will become of you in the present life and in the one to come» (cmp. Jerem.20:9; Ezek.3:16-21, 33:1-20; 1 Cor.9:16).

Chapter 16 - The Specialized Charisma of Priesthood

1. Special Priesthood in the Old Testament

God had chosen Israel and had separated it from the other nations to be a regal priesthood and a holy nation (Exod.19:5-6, Deut.14:2, 26:19). This however does not mean that there was no appointed hieratic order in God's people, to whom was assigned a special ministry.

Aaron and his sons belonged to this hieratic order, having been ordained by Moses by the pouring of chrismating oil over their heads, after being washed with water and dressed with hieratic vestments. (Exod.28:1, 37-39, 29:9, 30, 40:11-13; Levit.8:1-13). We also see in the Old Testament the instituting of the order of Levites, to whom was assigned a special ministry (Num.8:5-26).

No-one was allowed to transgress the order that God Himself had placed. On this point we are given a tragic lesson with the punishment of Kore.

From within the Holy Bible we are informed that Kore belonged to the tribe of Levi. However, he did not settle for the immense honour of offering sacred services in the Lord's tabernacle (Num.8:22); he also sought to misappropriate hieratic authority. He revolted against Moses and against Aaron:

«*…because the whole congregation—all are holy, and the Lord is among them…*» "Everyone is holy", Kore declared to Moses and Aaron*;* and «*…why do you rise up against the congregation of the Lord?* » "Why are you raising yourself above the people of God?" (Num.16:3) Moses in vain tried to bring Kore to his senses, underlining that God Himself chooses His Priests (Num.16:5-11; cmp.also Levit.8:1 etc.) and that consequently, Kore's conspiracy was not turned against people but against God Himself:

«*And when Moyses heard it, he fell face down, and he spoke to Kore and to all his congregation, saying, "God has enrolled, and He recognized the ones who are His and who are holy, and He brought them to Himself, and those whom He chose for Himself He brought to Himself. This do: Take for yourselves firepans, Kore and all his congregation, and put fire on them, and put incense on them before the Lord tomorrow. And it shall be, the man whom the Lord chooses, he shall be holy; let it be sufficient for you, sons of Levi!" And Moyses said to Kore, "Listen to me, sons of Levi! This is not a small thing for you, is it, that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel and brought you to himself to minister in the services of the tabernacle of the Lord and to stand before the congregation to serve them? And He brought you forward, and all your brothers, the sons of Levi with you—are you also seeking to serve as priests? Thus, are you and all your congregation that has gathered together against God. And as for Aaron—who is he that you are complaining against him?* » (Isn't Aaron the one who was chosen by God?)

The punishment of the mutineers and usurpers of the hieratic authority was an exemplary one:

«*Now as he stopped speaking all these words, the earth underneath them was split apart. And the earth was opened and swallowed them down, and their households and all the men who were with Kore and their cattle. And they went down, they and as much as was theirs, alive into Hades, and the earth covered them, and they perished from the midst of the congregation*» (Num.16:31-33. cmp. Num.17:16-28; Sirach 45:6-22).

At a later date, King Ozias also attempted to usurp hieratic authority. His punishment was likewise exemplary, as immediately after, leprosy appeared on his forehead and he remained a leper until the day of his death (2 Chron.26:16-21; cmp. 1 Chron. 13:9-10).

2. "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedek."

The Apostle Paul makes reference to the Psalm excerpt: «*The Lord swore and will not change His mind; "you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedek". »* "(Psalms 109:4).

He explains that Melchisedek was king of Salem and a "***Priest of God Most High***" (Gen.14:18). His name meant "king of righteousness and peace". It was said of him that he is «***without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but, made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually***» - that is, forever (Hebr.7:3).

The Apostle further underlines that, even though Abraham was a man belonging to the promise of God, it was not he who blessed Melchisedek, but instead, was himself blessed by Melchisedek (Gen.14:19) and had even offered him one-tenth (tithe) of all the spoils of the enemy which he had conquered (Gen.14:20). This signified that Abraham - albeit a patriarch according to the order of Aaron - had recognized the uniqueness of Melchisedek's Priesthood (Deut.14:22-23). «***Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better***», as the Apostle mentions (Hebr.7:7).

Therefore, just like Melchisedek, likewise Christ was not a priest according to the order of Aaron and was not descended from the tribe of Levi. « ***For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood***» (Hebr.7:13-14). As such, He could not therefore be counted among the Priests of the Old Testament; He is a Priest of another, «better», that is, a superior Testament (Hebr.7:22).

«***Also, there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's; for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath*** (Psalms 109:4)***, which came after the law, appoints the Son who is perfected forever.*** » (Hebr.7:23-28).

He entered «***once and for all the Holy of Holies***» and «***with His own blood***» secured «***eternal redemption***» (Hebr.9:12).

The Apostle delves deeper into the prophetic texts of the Old Testament and refers to the passage of Psalms: «***Sacrifice and offering You did not want, but ears You fashioned for me. Whole burnt offering and one for sin You did not request. Then I said, "Look, I have come; in a scroll of a book it is written of me. To do Your will, O my God, I desired."*** » (Psalms 39:7-9).

The Apostle says that the Psalmist is referring here to the Body of Christ « ···***By that will we have been sanctified - through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all***» (Hebr.10:5-14).

«***Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [...] not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*** (=the Divine Liturgy)***, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching***» (Hebr.10:19-25).

All the above prove that in the New Testament there is one and only High Priest: Christ. He is always present in every Christian congregation (Matth.28:20), even if it is comprised of only two or three persons (Matth.18:20). He is the Shepherd of the one and only Fold (John 10:16); the shepherd and the guardian of our souls (1 Pet.2:25); the «***great Shepherd of the sheep***» (Hebr.13:20); the «***Head Shepherd***» (1 Pet.5:4). He is - as we mentioned - the «***Great High Priest***» (Hebr.4:14), Who «***entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption [...] offered Himself without spot to God, to cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God***» (Hebr.9:12-14. Cmp.Ezek.34:15-24; 37:24).

On this point there are no chasms in the History of the Church. Wherever "***two or three***" (Matth.18:20) congregate in His Name in a Eucharist congregation, there also is the "Great" and only "Arch-priest", Christ. The same applies when the Gospel is preached - when the faithful unite in labours of love and they live in a brotherly bond. He is the "offerer and the offering"; He effects "***everything, in everyone***" (Col.3:11, 1 Cor.12:6)

3. The living bread, Who descended from heaven.

«***Then the Lord said to Moyses, "Look, I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out, and they shall collect the day's portion for a day***... » (Exod.16:4). «***And you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, and the people will drink***. » (Exod.17:6; Num.20:7-11).

It is the following two events from the life of the Israelites in the desert that the Apostle Paul is referring to. «***...all our fathers [...] ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*** » (1 Cor.10:1-5)

It was Christ, therefore, Who was following the people that were travelling to the Promised Land through the desert. He was the One Who provided the Manna that satisfied their hunger and the water that quenched their thirst. The Lord Himself - after His Incarnation - had proclaimed that those events in the Old Testament were a pre-imprint and depiction of the "bread of life" - that is, of the Divine Eucharist.

«***Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." And they said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore, everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which comes down***

from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. Therefore, many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." » (John 6:32-64).

All these testify that Christ - the only High Priest - had provided and continues to provide to the faithful the true bread of life, which is none other than His Body. This is not about a dead Body - that is, dead flesh. The Disciples had not comprehended the words of the Lord correctly. That is why Christ clarified that dead flesh - that is, the flesh which has no spirit in it - does not profit man in any way. But that the bread which Christ provides does have the Spirit inside it, Who rejuvenates and renders Him the source of life eternal. In other words, it is not the Body of the Lord in its dead state; it is His resurrected, deified Body. This is the Body into which the bread offering of the Divine Eucharist is transformed - not into a dead Body, which would not benefit us in anything.

4. Priesthood in the Church

In the New Testament it is said that God's promise to Abraham «***I shall give to your seed this land***» (Gen.12:7) is a reference that pertains to Christ (Gal.3:16-17) and to the «***sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus***» and holy Baptism (Gal.3:26-27; cmp.3:7-9). These are the genuine descendants of Abraham (Gen.21:12; Rom.9:6-8). Amongst this new "God's people" there are of course no differences; they are all members of the same worth; they are all «***one man, in Christ Jesus***» (Gal.3:28; 1 Cor.12:13; Col.3:11). However, in this, one body, there is a distinction - in regard to the ministry, the function of each individual within that common body. It is a functional distinction of the charismas, which reinforces even more the unity of the one and only corpus of the Church. This distinction between the ministries but also the unity of the Body of Christ is described by the Apostle Paul:

«***There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all***» (1 Cor.12:4-7).

We have already mentioned that Christ is "the shepherd of the sheep". Furthermore, that He is the only "teacher"; in which context, no-one is permitted to be called "Teacher" (Matth.23:8), just as no-one can be called "Father" in the context that we call God our Father (Matth.23:9).

However, among the charismas that God Himself distributes, there is also the charisma of "shepherd" and "teacher" - «***for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of***

Christ"»(Eph.4:11-12; 1 Cor.12:27-29). Those very Apostles themselves characterize themselves as spiritual father to those whom the grace of God rendered them reborn through their preaching (1 Cor.3:15; 2 Cor.6:13 and 12:14; Gal.4:19; Philemon 10; 3 John 4; cmp. also 1 Kings 2:12, 6:21 and 13:14), and they order honour and obedience to spiritual labourers (1 Cor.16:16; Phil.2:29-30; 1 Thess.5:12-13; Hebr.13:17).

We also observe the same thing about the only sacrifice, which the One and Only High Priest had offerred "once only" (Hebr.7:27) for the sake of the people of God. In other words, we can see that the Lord reassured the disciples that the bread and the wine which He had blessed during the Last Supper, were transformed into Body and Blood of His (Matth.26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20). He further hinged man's partaking of eternal life to communing the Mystery of consuming His Body and the drinking of His Blood (John 6:48-69). Which is why He gave His disciples the instruction that they too should perform that salvific mystery (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor.11:24-25).

The performing of that sacred mystery of course constitutes a commemoration and a proclamation of the Lord's unique sacrifice (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor.11:26), however its significance is not limited to the commemoration alone - as certain heretic people assert. During the sacred Mystery, there is an actual transformation of the bread into the Body and the wine into the Blood of the Lord. There was absolutely no doubt about this fact in the minds of the Apostles and in the first Christian Church:

«***The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread***» (1 Cor.10:16-17).

It is for this reason, that the Apostle instructs the Christians of Corinth to regard the Apostles as «***servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God***» (1 Cor.4:1). But apart from the authority to perform the divine Eucharist, the Lord also gives His disciples the authority to forgive or to bind the sins of the people (Matth.18:18; John 20:21-23) - an authority which according to the perception of the Scribes, only God has. This is a point of view however which we do not have any difficulty in accepting. It was because the Scribes had not believed in the divinity of the Lord that they had maintained that Christ was blaspheming when He assumed such an authority as being His (Matth.9:3; Mark 2:7)

All the aforementioned do not signify that Christ cedes His unique Priesthood to anyone; He remains «***a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedek***» (Ps.109:4; Hebr.7:21).

But - just as every Christian through holy Baptism becomes a member of the one and only Body of Christ and just as he partakes of Christ's holiness and is personally sanctified through his participation in the life of the Body of the Church, likewise, the Priesthood bestowed on people constitutes a partaking in the Priesthood of Christ. This way, the Apostles and their successors become the tangible images of Christ's presence in the Church, thus securing the unity within the body of Christ. In this sense, Apostolic succession is not a personal authority belonging to those who have been called upon by Christ to become the instruments of His Grace; rather, it is a liturgical (functional) authority, which relates internally to the Church, which is "Christ in His entirety" - i.e., the Head and the Members.

The fact that this authority pertains to the relationship with Christ and with the entirety of the Church is clearly witnessed in the Holy Bible. «***Just as the Father sent Me, thus I also send you***» (John 20:21), Christ tells His disciples; and then adds that whoever shall accept you and listen to your words, accepts Me and listens to Me (Matth.10:40; cmp.Luke 10:16; John 13:20). The disciples had no doubt that the Lord is «***the***

same God who works all in all» (1 Cor.12:6). «***If we confess our sins***», says John the Apostle characteristically, «***He*** (Christ) ***is trustworthy and just, and can forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness***» (1 John 1:9; cmp.Prov.28:13). As such, the Apostles did not have any words of their own; they preached the words of Christ. That is, they were "the mouth of Christ" (cmp. Matth.10:40; 28:20) and they pronounce those things that «***the Holy Spirit taught them***» (1 Cor.2:13; cmp.Acts 15:28). That authority was not their own; it was Christ's (1 John 1:9), which is why they did everything in the name of Christ (Col.3:17). «***...but we have the mind of Christ***», the Apostle Paul characteristically says (1 Cor.2:16).

The priesthood, therefore, of the Apostles constituted a partaking in the Priesthood of Christ, and their presence constituted a guarantee of Christ's presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.12:3) inside the Church. It was the supreme mystery of this presence.

5. The place of the Bishops in the Church

The place designated by the Holy Bible for the Apostles was assigned to the Bishops in the post-Apostolic era. Clement, Bishop of Rome, wrote towards the end of the first century that the Apostles had proclaimed the "Kingdom of God", baptized those who had believed in their kerygma, and had moved on to organizing the Churches by installing "Bishops and deacons". "And this, was not as something new" - he continued - "for many years ago it was written about Bishops and deacons: '***I will appoint your rulers in peace and your overseers in righteousness***'..."

This passage that Clement invoked is found in the prophet Isaiah. The prophet was speaking about the glory of New Jerusalem - the Church - which was to become «***an everlasting gladness, a joy for generations of generations***» (Isaiah 60:15) and adds: «...***And I will appoint your rulers in peace and your overseers in righteousness. And injustice shall no more be heard in your land, nor destruction or wretchedness within your borders***...» (Isaiah 60:17-18).

But this testimony by the first Church is not the only one. A few years later, Saint Ignatius wrote that Bishops stand "in the place of God" and are surrounded by the presbyters/elders, who are referred to as "God's convention (presbyterium)" and are "in the place of the Apostles' convention (presbyterium)". It is for this reason that he urges: «heed the bishop and the presbyters and the deacons... become the emulators of Jesus Christ, just as He heeded His own Father".

These are proof that in the first Church the authority of the Bishop was the authority of Christ and of the Church, and not a personal authority of the Bishop. Just as the Apostles had "***the mind of Christ***" (1 Cor.2:16) and the decisions that they took on ecclesiastic matters were not their own but those of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28), likewise the Bishops were obliged - as Saint Ignatius underlined - to abide "in the mind of Jesus Christ"; that is, to not impose their own personal views but to always reveal the opinion of Jesus Christ.

«Take care therefore to stand firm in the teaching of the Lord and of the Apostles, so that everything you do will be crowned with success», he said. It was for the same reason that Isaiah had prophesied that the dignitaries of the Church would guide in peace and judge with justice (Isaiah 60:17; cmp. Psalms 81:1-7).

Inside the corpus of the Church the Bishop does not only express the opinion of Christ, but also the presence of the invisible and unique Bishop, Jesus Christ, and is the guarantor of that presence. As such, the Bishop is the guarantor of the Lord's presence in the mysteries of the Church and the charismatic

energy of the Holy Spirit within Her. For this reason, it is mentioned in the Orthodox confession of Dositheos that without the office of Bishop, "nothing can be, or be called Church or anyone a Christian, at all".

That is why Saint Ignatius also says that «wherever the Bishop may appear, let the multitude stand there, just as wherever Christ may be, there the full Church is". And of course the divine Eucharist is both certain and guaranteed if performed by the Bishop or the one who has been authorized by him - that is, a certain Presbyter, who belongs to the "presbyterium" of the Bishop, which Saint Ignatius refers to as "a worthily-knit spiritual wreath".

However, no matter what the Bishop's privileges may be, he is not placed above the Church but rather is among the people of God, who, together with Christ, is the church in Her fullness. As mentioned by a contemporary theologian, the authority of the Bishop is the authority of the Church, and his ministry is a ministry within the Church. The Bishop and the faithful constitute an organic unity which cannot be separated. «Without a Bishop there would be no Orthodox faithful, but also, a Bishop cannot exist without any Orthodox faithful».

«The Bishop is in the Church, and the Church is in the Bishop», says Saint Cyprian and writes to the clergy of his Church that he does not attempt to do anything without their advice, or without the consent of the laity. This is reminiscent of that lovely phrase in Acts, which relates to the first Church, in which the heart and the soul of the faithful was one (Acts 4:32).

According, therefore, to these words by the Fathers of the Church, the Bishop is always understood as being in relation to the Body of the Church and - especially - to Her Head, Christ: «In Jesus Christ's opinion» (Ignatius; cmp.also 1 Cor.2:16, Acts 15:28). This is the reason that the Bishop is called upon to become a man of love, a servant of everyone, according to the model of Christ (Matth.20:26-28 and 23:11; Mark 9:35 and 10:43-44; Luke 22:27). «***If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you***», instructed the Lord (John 13:14-15). Thus, during his ministry, the Bishop is required to become a servant. He is required to always take the place of the weak ones, the ones who suffer, and become a father to them. His weapon and his power do not resemble the powers of the rulers of this world. He is called upon to impose himself through love, persuasion and martyrdom.

«***Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted*** (overpowering those allocated) ***to you,but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away***.» (1 Pet.5:2-4; cmp. also Ezek.34:1-31). What is more, during the ordination of Bishop, the one officiating beseeches Christ: «...Thou, o Christ, render this nominee for the stewardship of Hierarchic grace an emulator of You, the true Shepherd, who will deposit his life for the sake of Your sheep - to be a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, an educator to orphans, a teacher to infants, a light in the world... for it is You, God, Who shows charity and salvation to us...».

«***And you, son of man, I have given you as a sentinel to the house of Israel, and you shall hear a word from my mouth.*** » And you, son of man, I have installed as a guard over the Israelite people, so that you might hear a word from My own mouth, says God to the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek.33:7).

6. Apostolic succession

If the Bishop constitutes the guarantee of Christ's presence in the Church, then this would be a permanent institution, not a temporary one, because Christ remains with us, «***until the end of the world***» (Matth.28:20).

But what is the criterion that secures the continuity of the office of Bishop, so that every kind of adulteration is excluded at this point? Well, it is the so-called "Apostolic succession" - that is, the "descent" of today's Bishops from the Apostles, on the basis of their ordination (through the laying on of hands). One could say that this is the "skeleton" of the Church's body, while at its top as the Head is always Christ. This Apostolic succession is the instrument that secures the identity and the unity of the living body of the Church throughout the ages.

Let's observe this basic matter of Apostolic succession in the New Testament, in order to determine that it is not a later concoction but is the will of Christ and of His Apostles.

In the New Testament we see the Apostles preaching in various places, baptizing those who believed in their kerygma, and organizing the life of the Churches that they founded. They elected a capable person among the faithful and installed it as the head of a local Church. Afterwards, they give him the instruction to elect other capable faithful in order to install them in each city, as "presbyters (elders) and deacons".

It was in this manner that the Apostle Paul for example elected and installed Titus in the Church of Crete, and wrote to him that: «***For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you***» (Titus 1:5). In the same epistle, he spoke of the prerequisites that every Presbyter should have.

It was for the same purpose that Paul also left Timothy in Ephesus and reminded him that he should «***stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands***» (2 Tim.1:6; cmp. 1 Tim.4:14).

From the above, we notice that the Apostles installed responsible individuals in the local Churches and assigned to them the task of shepherding of the faithful. They had in fact installed them after the "laying on of their hands", thanks to which, those ordained received the "gift of God", under the provision that they would likewise impart it to others, in the manner taught to them by the Apostles: «***as I commanded you***» !! (Titus 1:5)

The fact that ordination was not a simple ritual, but actually had a charismatic-mystical character, is made evident by the Apostle's exhortation to Timothy: «***Do not lay hands on anyone hastily***! » (1 Tim.5:22; cmp. Acts 14:23, 20:28).

This, therefore, is Apostolic succession:

The imparting of "the gift of God" by the Apostles to the heads of the Churches and they in turn to others, in an unbroken succession through the ages, to this day.

It is in this manner that the Priesthood of Bishops of the Orthodox Church as well as of the remaining clergy of our day date back to the Apostles, and through them, to Christ Himself.

It is by this means that the identity of the Church is preserved, so that She may also have visible signs that can reassure us of that continuity and not be in danger of becoming misled by the presence of heresies.

With Apostolic succession, the Bishop is a specific person and his veridicality can be corroborated, just as his unity with the Church can be corroborated, throughout the ages.

Consequently, we are able to recognize who the Bishop is - that is, the person who expresses the presence of Christ and the unity of the Church throughout the ages. And since we recognize who the Bishop is, we can also know where the holy mysteries of the Church can be found, and where the true Church is.

Just as Christ had the Apostles together with Him, in like manner the Bishop - that visible representation of Christ - is surrounded by the Presbyters (Elders) and the Deacons. Together with them, all of God's people are united in one, unbroken unity. All of them together comprise the Church, with Christ as the Head.

Chapter 17 - Congregating the Scattered Ones

1. The salvific unity of the faithful

Just prior to Christ's crucifixional sacrifice, in that agonized prayer of His for all those who would believe in His name, the Lord asked the Father to safeguard them in a divine unity: «***that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me... that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect, into one...***» (John 17:21-23).

With these words, Christ did not invite the faithful to an external unity but an inner one - an absolute one, similar to the unity between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, from which Man had fallen away through his fall. One unity, whose basis and whose goal are the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, which signifies man's redemption and his perfecting: «***I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect, into one...***» (John 17:23).

The unity therefore which Christ speaks of, is not "the road to salvation"; it is salvation itself.

2. The divine Eucharist: the realization of one's union in Christ

In what manner can we attain that unity? Undoubtedly, the completion of this unity is linked to the triumph of the Church in the end of Time, during the Coming of the Lord and the final Judgment. However, even in this life there is a foretaste of that perfect unity for the faithful. It is the event of the divine Eucharist. The Apostle Paul characteristically says: «***For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread***» (1 Cor.10:17). The Lord Himself - when referring to the divine Eucharist - links man's participation to it with that very event of salvation and life, whereas He links man's abstention from the Eucharist, to a spiritual death: «***"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day". »*** (John 6:53-54)

After the Fall, people lost the unity between each other, which was dependent on God's love; they became internally alienated and so they dispersed. With His incarnation, Christ assumed the whole of mankind which was necrotized with Christ's death and was resurrected with Him into a new life, united once again within God's love. This is how Christ restored man to his former unity with God.

When the faithful congregate to perform the divine Liturgy, when they partake of the divine Eucharist, that is when they are once again reunited into one body - the resurrected and deified Body of Christ. That is when they «***come together as a Church***» (1 Cor.11:18) - when they comprise and reveal once again the Body of the Lord, that is, the Church. That is when the basic and essential Mission of the Incarnation and the Sacrifice of Christ is fulfilled, by which the Lord sought to «***He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.*** » (John 11:52).

This event of "gathering into one" all the scattered children of God is an excellent portrayal of the liturgical texts of our Church. One of the beautiful blessings of the Divine Liturgy of the first Christians expresses this with the following words: «Just as this portion was scattered over the mountains and being gathered became one, thus may Your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth, into Your kingdom"... In other words, "just as this piece of bread (which is used for the divine Eucharist) used to be wheat that was spread over the mountains and after being gathered became one, likewise during the performance of the divine Eucharist, may Your entire Church be gathered into one, from the ends of the earth, into Your kingdom."

And in the divine Liturgy of Basil the Great, the priest prays that: «...join all of us, who commune from the one bread and the one chalice, to each other, in the communion with the one Spirit... so that we might find mercy and grace together with all the Saints who had pleased You from the beginning».

In this manner, holy Communion gathers the scattered members of Christ which - together with Him, Who is the Head - comprise His Body and are an organic unity. This is the reason we can unreservedly relate the Church to the event of the gathering of the faithful, to the performance of the divine Eucharist and to the event of consuming the Body of the Lord and the drinking of His Precious Blood.

No-one can be a Christian outside of the divine Eucharist (that is, on his own), for a direct union with God. Christ had said that whosoever did not eat of His Body and drink of His Blood would have no life within him (John 6:53). Outside of the divine Eucharist, man can have the Holy Bible, the kerygma, prayer, and a moral life. But outside of the divine Liturgy, he cannot have the Body and the Blood of the Lord, which would grant him salvation and the true life. This is necessary for us to be aware of, because there are some who incorrectly believe that they are supposedly Christians, without participating in the Eucharistic gathering of the faithful - that is, in the divine Liturgy.

Apart from the above, we need to underline that in the divine Liturgy, it is not possible to have mere spectators among the faithful; that is, people who have not come for the sacred mystery. This however does not signify that anyone can come unprepared (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Saint Ambrose says on this matter very characteristically: «Receive on each day that which is useful for that day. Live in a manner that makes you worthy of it».

3. "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father..."

"Liturgy" in the Greek language implies "the function of the people". And from what we have mentioned, it now becomes obvious what the divine function is, which takes place in the Eucharistic gatherings of the faithful.

In the divine Liturgy, the faithful comprise the Church and they reveal to the world the Body of Christ. They proclaim that with Christ's death and resurrection, the scattered ones have once again reassembled "into one" and that they are now participating in this synaxis of God's children (John 11:52; 1 Cor.10:16, 11:26).

«Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit», the Priest announces at the beginning of the divine Liturgy. Thus, the kingdom is no longer an event that belongs exclusively to the future, and which mankind cannot have any foretaste of. The kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit has already commenced, from this life, and it is the divine Liturgy and our participation in it (Matth.12:28; Luke 17:21; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27). It is the event of man's communion in the life of the Triadic God, which is realized with the consuming of the Lord's Body and the drinking of His Blood, as well as the event of the unity of all the children of the Kingdom within the one Body of the Lord.

4. The external characteristics of the Orthodox synaxis

If the principal significance of the divine Liturgy is our salvation, then it is imperative that we underline the characteristic features of the true divine Liturgy so that we can distinguish it from the congregations of heretics, which do not contribute towards the unity, but rather the division of the Lord's Body and are a threat to the event of our salvation (cmp.1 Cor.1:13; 11:18-34). This is a necessity that we must be familiar with, when travelling to foreign lands and are not familiar with the details of the life of the Christian communities that exist there.

As mentioned earlier, the Bishop of a region represents the image of Christ and is the guarantor of the unity of the faithful in the One Body of the Church. In the ancient Church, the divine Eucharist was performed only by the Bishop or by a Presbyter (Elder) who belonged to the "presbyterium" of that Bishop and had received the bishop's authorization to perform that function. This was the way that the Bishop constituted the guarantee of Christ's presence, which is necessary for the performance of the divine Eucharist, given that Christ is "the offerer and the offered" (cmp.Hebr.7:23-28). "Wherever Christ is, there the Church is", according to Saint Ignatius, who also notes that where the Church is, there the Bishop also is. It is not a portion of the Church there, but the "catholic" (=entire) Church, in whole - that is, the Orthodox Church. The presence therefore of the Bishop constitutes a guarantee of the genuineness of the Orthodox Liturgy.

The Bishop is not a self-titled personage. He ascribes his Priesthood - through Apostolic succession - to the Apostles and from there to Christ Himself. The canonical, therefore, and genuine Bishop of the Orthodox Church must be found in that succession, otherwise, he does not have the Priesthood that Christ had instituted. This Priesthood is conferred by the Bishop to all the remaining clergymen - to the Presbyters and the Deacons whom he himself has ordained. With this practice, the dependence of the Presbyters and the deacons on the Bishop as the centre of the unity among the faithful is revealed, with the performance of the divine Eucharist as the basis.

We are aware of course that in various parishes today the divine Liturgy is not performed by the Bishop but by the Priests, who are assisted in this ritual by the Deacons as well. However, these Priests belong to the "presbyterium" of one Bishop. They furthermore necessarily commemorate the name of the Bishop during each divine Liturgy that they perform. In fact, not only the name of the Bishop who had ordained them, but also of the Bishop in whose jurisdiction the divine Liturgy is performed. In the Orthodox Church there is no priest who does not come under a canonical Orthodox Bishop, nor without belonging to the "presbyterium" of a Bishop. Nor is an Orthodox divine Liturgy ever performed without the commemoration of the Bishop's name.

Thus, it is a basic matter to note which Bishop is commemorated in a divine Liturgy, and whether he is a canonical Bishop of the Orthodox Church in that region. Just as every Presbyter needs to belong to the "presbyterium" of the local Bishop, likewise, the canonical Bishop must belong to the order of Bishops of the Orthodox Church.

But, how can we determine if a Bishop is canonical? That is, if he belongs to the Orthodox Church?

For a Bishop to be Orthodox, he must be in communion with the other Bishops in the same land, who, together with the Orthodox pleroma (fold) comprise the Orthodox Church of that land (for example, the Church of Greece, the Church of Cyprus, etc.).

We should know that in order to be an Orthodox Church, every autonomous Church must also be in communion with the other Orthodox Churches in all the world. All the Orthodox Churches combined comprise the one body of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. And all of the Bishops "appointed far and wide, are of the mind of Jesus" (Ignatius).

In this way, while we may have many parishes in one place, and while we may perform the divine Liturgy in many places, the Bishopric is one. While the Bishoprics may be many in one land, they together comprise one, autonomous Church. Finally, while the autonomous Churches may be more than one, they are allunited in the Faith and in the divine Eucharist, and they all comprise the One, Orthodox Church - the One Body of Christ, and they all reveal "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor.2:16; Acts 15:28).

This Church may be scattered throughout the world, but She is congregated in a mystical way with the performance of the divine Liturgy, just as the grains of wheat are gathered to comprise the one bread of the divine Eucharist, which is transformed into the Body of Christ.

What, then, should we look out for in order to ensure that a synaxis - a divine Liturgy - belongs to the Orthodox Church and guarantees us salvation?

As mentioned earlier, we must find out to which Bishop the officiating priest of the divine Liturgy belongs. Then, it is imperative that we find out to which Church that Bishop belongs. If that Church is united with our Orthodox Church - where we have been incorporated through our Baptism - then we can be sure that divine Liturgy is a synaxis of the Orthodox Church and can guarantee our salvation.

As to how basic this matter is, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem reveals it to us. When addressing travellers and migrants, he says that they must be careful to not enter a congregation, nor participate in a liturgy, if they have not previously ascertained that the synaxis is not a conventicle of heretics and people who have seceded from the canonical Bishop. «And should you perchance migrate», he says, «do not only seek

where the Temple is, because the heresies of the impious dare to name their (predatory) caverns Temples. Do not seek only where the Church is, but rather, where the Orthodox Church is» (Catech.16:26).

How misled indeed are those people who abandon the Orthodox Church - that is, the Orthodox worship - and resort to other congregations! They risk losing that which Christ was sacrificed for: the salvation of their souls. Because salvation is possible, only through unity with the Church - that is, with the Eucharistic synaxis of the Church. And the criterion for that synaxis is its union with the canonical Orthodox Bishop of that region.

All of the above prove just how far we must flee from the congregations that do not belong to our Church and that are not taking place with the knowledge and the approval of the Bishop to which we belong, and who is for us the guarantor of unity with Christ and a guarantee of His presence there.

Chapter 18 - Our Parish

1. The catholicity of the Parish

We mentioned that the Church is assembled and revealed with the event of the divine Eucharist and our participation in it. The divine Eucharist is the mystery that transforms a community - such as the parish - into a Church (1 Cor.10:16-17).

Where Christ is, there the catholic (whole) Orthodox Church is - as we have seen Saint Ignatius telling us earlier on -who also proclaimed that it is an inner catholicity and not an external (geographical) one that characterizes a parish. The reason for this is because with the divine Eucharist, Christ, the Head of the Church, is in the parish, as is the whole Church.

This place of the parish is fully based on Paul's teaching in the Holy Bible. «...***when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you [...] Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God [...]? For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat*** ...» (1 Cor.11:18-23).

Here, we notice that the Apostle uses the term "Church" (ecclesia), not in a static sense but a dynamic one, and relates it to the congregations of the Christian community in Corinth for the purpose of performing the divine Eucharist. In other words, every time that Christians of a parish come together for the performance of the divine Eucharist, they become a Church - the whole Church (cmp.Rom.16:23). That is why the Apostle so categorically condemns every division in those congregations, stating that everything that upsets that mystic unity constitutes an offence towards the body of Christ and a disregard towards the whole Church (cmp.1 Cor.11:17-34; 1:13). The fact that a parish is the expression of the life of the whole Church is also revealed by the parishioners' lives in general, which are realized within the framework of parish living.

A parish has Priests, who come under a canonical Orthodox Bishop of that region and who guarantee the presence of Christ in the liturgical life as well as unity with Him. In the parish we will find holy Baptism, holy Chrismation and all the sacred mysteries. We also find the mystery of mysteries there: the divine

Eucharist. Every time that parishioners congregate for the performance of the divine Liturgy, they must be conscious of the fact that they are convening "in Church" (1 Cor.11:18); that they comprise the whole Church (cmp.Rom.16:23). Each member of a parish belongs to the Catholic (whole) Orthodox Church. Thus, a parish does not comprise a segment of the Church but the whole Church, whose catholicity - as we saw earlier - is determined internally, with the presence of Christ in the divine Eucharist.

During the divine Liturgy of a parish, the Bishop is "present", signified by the fact that his name is commemorated by the officiating Priest. Also present are the Presbyters, the Deacons and all of God's people. Also present are all the angels, along with the Most Holy Theotokos and all the Saints. The Father is also present, Who sends forth the Holy Spirit Who transforms the bread and the wine into into Body and Blood of Christ. Present also is all of Creation, which is assumed into the divine Liturgy and is transformed into a new Creation "in Christ": they are the bread and the wine, which become the Body and the Blood of Christ; they are the waxen candles, the holy icons, the Cross, and all of the material objects that participate in the divine Liturgy. It is the water, the oil, the incense, the palm fronds, the flowers... all of God's creations are united in the divine Liturgy, rediscovering that which had been lost with man's Fall - that is, the inner union, the proper relationship with God, which is a eucharistic (thanksgiving) one; a relationship of offering on the part of man (cmp.1 Chron.29:14-16).

In the divine Eucharist and in the liturgical life of our Church everything relates and is offered to God, so that He once again becomes the centre of the world. The divine Liturgy of a parish - just like every divine Liturgy - thus becomes Paradise - the Kingdom of God - and all who actually participate in it, and also get a taste, even from this life, of the commencement of the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

2. In peace let us go forth!

The event of this unity is what all the members of a parish are invited to experience. We are all invited to transform the life of our parish into a miniature Paradise, where we can once again experience the lost unity with Christ, the Head of the Church, and with all of Her members - all of our brethren.

That which we are so intensely obliged to experience in the divine Eucharist - that is, the One Bread (1 Cor.10:17) - we are also required to experience outside the divine Liturgy, in our daily lives with our brethren, so that our whole life becomes a continuing Eucharist (thanksgiving). This is the reason the Priest tells us at the end of the divine Liturgy that we must go forth in peace. "In peace go forth!" he says. What he means is that the sense of brotherhood we experienced with holy communion should be continued in our everyday life as well, throughout the week. That is what we should "go forth" towards!

We must admit however that most times, we do not have this sensation - not during the divine Liturgy, nor after it, in our everyday associations with other members of our parish. We do not sense the Divine Eucharist as a mystery of communion with Christ and with our brethren, and that is why we do not feel the consequences that this has on our daily lives. That is the reason we cannot understand how we can have a foretaste of the Kingdom of God during the divine Eucharist.

The holy communion interests us, in the sense that it is a way to be united with Christ, but we forget that it is not possible for us to be joined to the head of a body if we are not joined simultaneously to all the members of that Body. «***There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your***

calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all... », as the Apostle underlines (Ephes.4:4-6). Whoever dorgets this basic truth cannot be joined to Christ.

3. Charismas in the life of our parish

Not all the members of a parish have the same fervent faith or the same love for God and their brethren. So, it is only natural they will not display the same zeal for the Church. However, it is the aware members of the parish who comprise that spiritual leaven which - albeit minimal - is destined to leaven all the dough (Matth.13:33; 1 Cor.5:6). Salt is likewise minimal, but its effectiveness is tremendous, but only if it preserves its ability to be salty and is not «unsalty» for seasoning (see Mark 9:50, cmp.also Matth.5:13, Luke 14:34). This means all the charismas must be utilized «***for the edification of the Church***» (1 Cor.14:12). «***Let all things be done for edification***» (1 Cor.14:26). This should be kept in mind by every faithful. Each faithful has received - as mentioned earlier - the seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit (Eph.1:13-14 and 4:30; 1 John 2:20 and 27). He has received various charismas (gifts) which should be activated within the parish's life of worship and its entirety of activities. According to the Apostle, «***But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit [...]. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit***. » (1 Cor.12:7-13).

«***But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary***» (1 Cor.12:20-22). «***For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another***» (Rom.12:4-5).

«***But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually***» (1 Cor.12:24-27).

Saint Gregory the Theologian says that all the members of the Church have received the gift of the true light: both they who hold high ranks in Her Body, as well as they whose opus is the lowlier labours. All are joined together within the common Body of the Church and all brethren serve the other brethren with their individual ministries. «Let no-one believe», he says, «that he possesses the gift of the true light as his personal possession alone... Other members help the body to see the light of day, but they don't lose their contact with the soil at all. Although the eye may be turned towards the light and should protect itself from dust so that it is not blinded, the foot fulfils its own mission when it is not afraid of becoming dirty from its contact with the soil. Thus, all the members of the body are united by the precise fact that they serve one another mutually. Because the foot runs while serving the eye and the eye sees in order to light the path of the foot. The same happens with the members of the Holy Church: they should be discerned by their individual roles, while being joined together through love, so that the more "refined" individuals show the way to those who are more inclined towards the things of this world - much like the foot being guided by the eyes. What they do however - when utilizing their activity on their own part when preoccupying themselves with worldly things - they should do so, for the benefit of those who offer loftier services, so that the foot does not walk only for its own sake, but also for the sake of the eye, which shows

it the path... It is not only those who hold the first ranks in the Church that receive the gift of the light, but also the humbler members which, despite their own desire to ascend to those heights, nevertheless remain amid those humble occupations on account of the service that they provide».

We cannot therefore isolate ourselves from our brethren, nor "bury" the talent in the sight of God - the talent which we received and was given to us to be utilized for the edification of our brethren. If we do that, we are not "faithful servants" but rather, "evil servants" (Matth. 24:45-51, 25:14-30, Luke 12:43-46, Luke 19:12-27)

It is our obligation to participate, actively and responsibly, in the life and the activities of our parish, in accordance with the talent that each one of us has received. We do not have the right to refuse our services when we are asked to. «***As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ***» (1 Pet.4:10-11. cmp.also 1 Cor.14:16-19).

«Come, ye faithful, let us work willingly for the Lord; for He distributes to His servants the wealth, and accordingly let each of us multiply the talent of Grace: let each one of us be adorned with beneficial works, let the other perform a function of splendour; may the faithful commune by word with the uninitiated, and another, scatter wealth to the poor... for thus we should multiply the loan, and as faithful stewards of Grace be made worthy of the Lord's joy. Make us worthy of that (joy), Christ our God, as the philanthropist that You are. » (Troparion of Great Tuesday).

Come, all you faithful, let us willingly cultivate the gifts out of love for the Lord, Who so richly distributes them to His servants. Let each one of us strive to multiply the talents that He gave us. Let the one impart wisdom through his virtuous deeds. Let the other offer his splendid services to the whole of his community. Let whoever has become familiar with the faith transmit it with his words to those who are ignorant of it and let another scatter his wealth to the poor. In that way, we will be multiplying that which God loaned to us and as faithful stewards of God's gifts, may we become worthy of the Lord's rejoicing.

Chapter 19 - Repentance in Our Life

1. Repentance as a permanent state in the life of the faithful

We mentioned that the Church is assembled and revealed through the event of the divine Eucharist and our participation in it. The divine Eucharist is the mystery that transforms a community - such as the parish - into a Church (1 Cor.10:16-17). We also mentioned that upon Baptism, man enters a spiritual arena and is called upon to fight against the powers of darkness that assault him externally through his senses, thus giving birth to passions.

In order for him to remain a victor in that fight against his passions and his egotistical tendencies, he must be continuously alert. Every single thing that alienates man from God's love and leads him to egotistical displays which are an offence to God's love and to his brethren must be cast out by the wrestling Christian. This perpetual struggle to completely set his own self aside, to regard himself as forever indebted to God's and his brethren's love and his struggle to respond to that love, leads that man

to a perpetual repentance and it opens the way to God's grace. That is why John the Baptist's sermon on repentance was the opening of the path by which "***He who cometh after me***" (Matth.3:11) had said "***Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is nigh***" (Matth.3:2) It was for the same reason that the Lord had also begun His sermon with the words: ***"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."*** (Mark 1:15). Repentance is not a passing matter in the life of the faithful; it becomes a permanent state, which has no end in this lifetime.

Saint Isaac the Syrian says that repentance "is necessary for all those who desire salvation, both for sinners and for the righteous. Perfection knows no limits, so that even the perfection of the perfected is imperfect. That is why repentance remains incomplete, up until the moment of death - both in regard to its duration and its works."

We observe this perpetual state of repentance in the lives of the Saints of our Church. No-one has been able to discern in them the slightest trace of a pharisaic self-satisfaction with regard to personal sanctity and personal virtue; they always lived in a state of vigilant readiness and profound repentance.

It has been written about Saint Anthony that when he arrived at a very old age, he said to his pupils:

«It is now time for me to depart also, for I am nearly 105 years old.... They, when they heard these words, began to weep, to embrace the Elder, and to kiss him repeatedly. But he, as though fleeing from a foreign city for the purpose of going back to his homeland, chatted with them very cheerfully and counseled them to not neglect their labours and not abandon their ascesis, but to live every day like they are about to die. I am going to follow the path of the Fathers, he said to them. I can see the Lord calling to me. You must all stay alert and do not forfeit your many years of ascesis; but rather, fight to preserve your zeal, as though you are beginning just now, for the first time. Know the demons that are a threat to you. Know how savage they are, but also how weak they are in power. Do not fear them; instead, you should breathe Christ even more and believe in Him. Live in such a manner, as though you expect to die every day...».

Thus, for one to live in such a manner - as though he is about to die at any moment - that is the way of life of repentance.

2. The mystery of confession

When we speak of repentance, we often use this term in a more confined sense in order to denote the Holy Sacrament of Confession.

When - after Baptism - man succumbs to the attacks of the devil and in a specific manner, with thoughts or even with actions, offends God's love and the love of the Church, the love towards the remaining members of Christ, then this praxis of his constitutes a wound that wreaks damage to the entire corpus of the Church.

It is for this reason that the Church takes appropriate measures and caters to the immediate cure, or, if this is not possible, then to the exemption of that member from Holy Communion, until that member has recovered and changes course. To this end, the Church provides the sacred mystery of Confession. "***Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven.***" (Matth.18:18; 16:19).

"So, Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20,21-23).

It is not the priest who actually forgives; it is Christ, together with the priest and the remaining members of His Body - that is, the entire Church - who once again receives the ailing member into Her bosom and restores it fully with its participation in the Divine Eucharist.

«May the Lord forgive you, through me the sinner, of all of your..... Go in peace, without having any further care regarding the trespasses which you have confessed to me....», says one of the blessings of sacred Confession that is read by the Confessor.

And as the Apostle John also underlines:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:9) ***My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world."*** (1 John 2:2).

Furthermore, it is obvious that this "confession of sins" must take place in the presence of those who have received the gift of the Holy Spirit to forgive sins in the name of Christ, in accordance with the instruction of Christ Himself. (John 20:21-23)

3. The proper manner of confession

How should the faithful approach Confession? The answer to this question is provided by Saint John of the Ladder:

"Reveal your wound to the spiritual physician. Say to him and do not be ashamed: '*the trauma is mine, father - this wound is my own. It happened on account of my own indolence and no-one else is the cause - not a person, not a demon, not the flesh, nor anything else - just my own negligence*.' During confession, become like a convicted person, both in your appearance and in your thoughts. Lower your head to the ground in shame; dampen if you can with fervent tears the feet of the physician, as though they are the feet of Christ..."

These words by Saint John of the Ladder bring to mind the Prophet Joel:

"...***rend your hearts and not your clothing. And return to the Lord, your God, for He is merciful and compassionate, patient and very beneficent..."*** (Joel 2:13) Don't tear apart your garments but rather your hearts, with the pain of repentance and the awareness of guilt; return to the Lord, because He is merciful and compassionate....

"We have sinned; we have been impious; we have done wrong, O Lord our God, against all of your requirements." (Baruch 2:12).

"***And we have all become like unclean people; all our righteousness is like the rag of a*** (menstruating) ***woman who sits apart."*** (Isaiah 64:5; cmp. Daniel 9:5; Proverbs 20:9).

True confession grants the repentant person the absolution of sins and restores him - as mentioned earlier - in the Church.

Man, however, re-enters the spiritual arena and is called upon to struggle continuously in order to defeat his passions (which had been reinforced even more through his sinning and are now exerting even more power over him). Only if ***"the lawless turns back from all his lawless acts that he committed and keeps all my commandments and does justice and mercy, he shall live by life; he shall not die."*** (Ezekiel 18:21)

"By my will do I actually will the death of the lawless one, says the Lord, rather than for him to turn back from his wicked way and live? After the righteous one turns back from his righteousness and commits injustice like all the lawless acts that the lawless commits, none of his righteous acts that he performed shall be remembered, for his transgression by which he transgressed and in his sins that he committed in these he shall die. And you said, "The way of the Lord does not go straight." Hear now, O house of Israel; does my way not go straight? Is it not your way that does not go straight? When the righteous turns back from his righteousness and should he commit transgression and die, by the transgression that he committed—by it he shall die. And when a lawless one turns back from his lawlessness that he committed and should he perform judgment and righteousness, he has preserved his soul and has turned back from all his impieties that he committed; he shall live by life; he shall not die. And they say—the house of Israel—" The way of the Lord is not straight." Is my way not straight, O house of Israel? Is it not your way that is not straight? I will judge you, each one, according to his way, O house of Israel, says the Lord. Turnabout, and turn back from all your impieties, and they shall not be for you as a punishment for injustice. Throw away from yourselves all your impieties that you committed against me and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. And why are you dying, O house of Israel? For I do not will the death of the dying, says the Lord." (Ezekiel 18:23-32)

"Now you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus you spoke, saying, "Our errors and lawless acts are with us, and in them we waste away.And how will we live?" Say to them, I live, says the Lord; I do not wish the death of the impious, rather that the impious turn back from his way and he live. Turn back from your way by turning back, and why are you dying, O house of Israel? Say to the sons of your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in whatever day he err, and the lawlessness of the impious shall not harm him on whatever day he turn back from his lawlessness, and the righteous shall not be able to be saved. When I say to the righteous, "He trusts in his righteousness," and should he commit lawlessness, none of his righteous acts shall be recalled in his injustice that he has committed; in it he shall die. And when I say to the impious, "Bydeath you shall be put to death, and you shall turn back from your sin," and should he perform judgment and righteousness and restore a pledge and give back robbery, walk in the ordinances of life so as not to do what is wrong, by life he shall live, and he shall not die; none of his sins that he has committed shall be recalled, for he has performed judgment and righteousness; in them he shall live. And the sons of your people shall say, "The way of the Lord is not right," and this way of theirs is not right. When a righteous one has turned back from his righteousness and should he commit acts of lawlessness, he shall also die in them. And when the sinner turns back from his lawlessness and performs judgment and righteousness, in them he shall live. And this is what you said, "The way of the Lord is not right"; I will judge each of you by his ways, O house of Israel." (Ezekiel 33:10-20).

Thus, for the faithful to be supported in his struggle against his passions and cure them completely, the spiritual father sometimes imposes penances - whichever ones he considers necessary - depending on each case. These penances are not punishments; they are the medicine that is regarded as necessary for confronting the danger that has originated from the passions.

Chapter 20 - The Sacrament of the Holy Unction

1. The constitution of the holy Sacrament

That which had made a particular impression on the Judeans during Christ's lifetime was the authority He had over evil spirits and His power of healing every kind of sickness.

Even more amazing however was the fact that Christ had also imparted this authority to the Apostles: «***And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease***.» (Matth.10:1).

And when they returned, filled with enthusiasm, they exclaimed to Christ: «***Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.*** » (Luke 10:17).

Mark the Evangelist also mentions that the Apostles preached repentance to the people, adding that they «***And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them. »*** (Mark 6:13).

However, this healing power remained - in accordance with the desire of the Lord - as a prerogative of the Church, in which Christ is present. The Apostle Jacob (James) notes characteristically in the event that a Christian falls ill: «***Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.*** » (James 5:14-15).

It is self-evident that this healing action does not constitute an act of magic, as it is performed with faith and prayer, and is done "***in the name of the Lord***" (see also Acts 3:6; 16:4,10; 9:34).

2. How the Holy Unction relates to Confession

The holy Sacrament of the Unction is not only linked to the healing of the body, but also to the healing of the soul: «***And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven***», as the Apostle so characteristically adds (James 5,15).

This however does not mean that we can substitute the holy Sacrament of Confession with it. With holy Unction we receive spiritual reinforcement and - as mentioned by several Fathers - we are also forgiven any sins that we may have forgotten and consequently weren't able to confess.

The primary significance of the holy Unction is to pray for the health of the body. This is the reason our Church links these two Sacraments and exhorts those - for whom the Unction is performed - to also go to Confession.

3. A Sacrament of the Church's act of love and caring

Characteristically, the holy Unction in the Orthodox Church is normally performed by seven priests - that is, by a symbolic number that denotes fullness - without this meaning that it cannot also be performed by fewer priests, or even one alone. However, it is not only the priests that are seven in number; the blessings are also seven in number, as are the Apostolic readings and the Apostolic excerpts that are recited.

This fullness of the number seven signifies that the holy Unction expresses and reveals the love and the caring of the overall Church for the bodily and spiritually ailing member of Hers. The entire parish that the patient belongs to is represented by the presbyters and it also joins in with its prayers and love for the patient, who, as a member of the Church, must sense the presence and the caring of the other members. This is something that the patient is especially in need of, during times of sickness and loneliness and when confronted by the danger of physical death.

During this holy Mystery, the Church prays for the full recovery and complete therapy of Her ailing member, so that it be delivered "safe and intact" back to Her, so that it will be able to "please and fulfill" God's will.

«His mouth is replete with praise for You», as another prayer characteristically says. «Open his lips, so that they may glorify Your Name, extend his arms so that they may execute Your commandments; guide his feet on the path of Your Gospel; secure well with Your Grace the mind and the members of his body».

And when all the body is anointed with the holy oil, the priest recites the following words:

«Most holy Father, Physician of souls and of bodies, You Who has sent Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ Who heals every sickness and Who redeems from death, heal also Your servant ..(name).., for You are the source of healing...»

This, therefore, is the favour that the Church petitions for the complete healing of body and soul. The result of this supplication does not belong to the Church, but to God's love - except that this love does not always correspond to the subjective thought and the limited volition of man.

Chapter 21 - The Charisma of Matrimony

1. The communion of man and woman

«***And God made humankind; according to divine image He made it; male and female He made them***» (Gen.1:27)

The image of God - mankind - was created from the beginning as a pair: as a man and a woman. Just as the Triadic God is not a unit, thus mankind was likewise not created as a unit. «***Have you not read that He***

who made them at the beginning made them male and female? » as Matthew the Evangelist repeats (Matt.19:4; cmp Gen.1:27).

In other words, the dogma of the Holy Trinity - which is expressed by the "oneness" of essence and the "threeness" of hypostases - constitutes a basic truth which also expresses the reality of mankind. This immense and unique reality (the Holy Trinity) constitutes the basis of our lives and the foundation of our salvation.

This is how we can explain - without any hesitation - this Old Testament verse and underline that man was created "in the image of" the Trinitarian God, both in regard to man's nature as well as the fact of man's "oneness" with other people. This is the reason man was created from the beginning as a couple - as man and woman.

The Holy Bible makes very frequent references to the mystery of marriage. In the Book of Proverbs, we read that «***Fathers distribute house and substance to their children, but a woman is joined to a man by God.*** » (Proverbs 19:14); the Prophet Malachi underlines that God Himself is the guarantor and witness of the marital bond (Malachi 2:14) - the common Creator of man and woman.

The same Prophet opposes the perception of his era, where the sole purpose of marriage was believed to be the acquisition of children (cmp.Wisdom of Solomon 4:1-6 and Wisdom of Sirah 16:1-4) and that consequently, divorce was permitted after the fulfillment of this purpose. The Prophet implies that the essence of this Mystery is found in the actuation of a common life, in the preservation and the cultivation of the unbreakable bond between spouses, who are rendered "one spirit and one body" (Malachi 2:15, Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8). It thus becomes obvious why God "abhors separation", that is, divorce, which deconstructs the primary purpose of the Mystery (Malachi 2:16).

The same meaning must also be ascribed to the following words of the Holy Bible: «***But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery***.» (Matth.5:32 and 19:9; Luke 16:18). «***... but fornicators and adulterers God will judge***. » (Hebrews 13:4).

On the basis of the above we can also say that man's destination is to become "in the likeness of" his Creator - that is, to live a life of complete love with his fellow-man, in accordance with the divine model - in accordance with the Trinitarian God's kind of love. In other words, this destination is not unrelated to the communion of the two sexes of the one mankind.

2. Communoin of love

It is obvious, that communion between man and woman will not correspond to human nature, if it is attempted outside of God's love, which is the cause and the source of unity and love in the world.

For as long as Adam remained within God's love, he regarded his wife Eve as a part of himself (Genesis 2:23-24). But with his act of disobedience - when he ceased to love God - that is when he looked upon his wife as a foreign individual; and it was also the reason he placed all the responsibility of that disobedience upon her (Genesis 3:12).

The differentiation in mankind (as man and woman) and the marriage union are both a benefit that God has provided for mankind and evidence of His tender care, which - after man's fall - has become the prerequisite for one's hope for Salvation that was promised to him by God. Because from the very first moment of man's fall, God promised him rectification; He did not abandon man, leaving him to wander through life without hope. (Gen.3:15) It was the Incarnation of Christ, Who "vacated" Himself to become a man in the flesh, and Who did not hesitate to go as far as the ultimate sacrifice on the Cross for the sake of His beloved people (Philip.2:7).

How could fallen man possibly comprehend such a gesture of God's love? How could he possibly grasp the divine will of that God of love Who entered upon a personal relationship with man? Man, therefore needed to have a specific foretoken of that perfect union of God with man, in the Person of the God-Man Christ: the union of divine nature with human nature. And that foretoken - that foreshadowing - that heralding of man's redemption with the Incarnation of Christ - is the union of Marriage between a man and a woman.

Thus, the love of God is what constitutes the very starting point of marriage, and at the same time the purpose of marriage. In other words, marriage constitutes a communion of love.

3. In Christ, and in the Church

It is characteristic that, when the Holy Bible speaks of marriage it makes reference to the marriage of Christ to His Bride - the Church - and simultaneously to the marriage of a man to a woman, whose marriage it always relates to the bond between Christ and the Church.

«***For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*** » (Ephesians 5:23-32).

The model therefore of spouses and of the conjugal bond is Christ and His bond with the Church. This is the manner that the natural bond between man and woman becomes a "great mystery". One surpasses oneself, ceases to live selfishly, with one's own person as the centre. Instead, one transcends division and rediscovers the true self, in the unity and the love within marriage. "*Man and woman, who thought they were two from the beginning*...", says Saint John the Chrysostom, "...*observe now, how He has re-attached them and once again brings them together into one, through marriage*".

In this manner, mankind returns to the unity of man and woman, which will be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God, where there shall no loger be "male and female", but all shall be "***in one: Christ Jesus***" (Gal.3"28), "***as are the angels in heaven***" (Matth.22:30, Mark 12:25, Luke 20:35). This is the reality that a Christian person has a foretaste of, within the mystery of the Divine Eucharist, where everyone is united into the one body of Christ and His Church.

4. The Eucharistic context of the divine mystery

As mentioned, the divine Liturgy is a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven and the final uniting of God's people. It is in this light that we can comprehend why the Christian marriage was linked to the Divine Eucharist in the ancient Church: because the Divine Eucharist was the main feature of the holy mystery. Christ attended the Wedding at Canaa and symbolized this correlation by means of a miracle: the transformation of water to wine. With this act, Christ not only admitted the overall rejoicing of the marriage; He not only blessed the entire reality of marriage, but simultaneously also symbolized the Divine Eucharist itself, that is, the transformation of the wine into His Blood and the bread (of the wedding feast) into His Body, and the assumption and metamorphosis of that marital bond into the Body of the Church, which is also His Body.

«*When the husband and wife are joined together through marriage*», says Saint John the Chrysostom, «*they no longer appear as something terrestrial, but as an image of God Himself*». In another excerpt he characterizes the Christian marriage as a «*miniature Church*».

Within the Christian marriage, man is called upon to live an "in Christ communion", that is, "***concerning Christ, and the Church***" (Ephes.5:32). Within a Christian marriage, Christ is also present with the Christian spouses, in accordance with His promise that He will be present wherever two people are gathered in His name (Matth. 18:20).

According to the aforementioned, we can understand why a Father of the Church refers to marriage as a "house of God" and why a contemporary theologian proclaims that in a Christian marriage, three persons are being married: "the husband and the wife to each other, and they with Christ". In other words, it is a marriage that takes place "in the Lord" (1 Cor.7:39).

5. Marriage outside the Church

From all the above, it becomes clearly evident that there is a huge difference between the carnal union of two people outside the Church and the union in the sacred mystery of marriage. The conjugal bond outside the Church relates to laws of nature - and in fact, of nature in its fallen and corrupted state.

The same applies, even when we relate the meaning of marriage to societal purposes or when we refer to a demographic problem. In all of these cases, marriage does not manage to transcend the reality of death. That is the reason it cannot possibly become acceptable as a sacred mystery in these cases.

On the contrary, the Christian marriage - which is blessed by God and is assumed into the Church - has, as its primary meaning and its final purpose the fullness of conjugal love, the fullness of that unity which does not end with death, but enters into eternity.

«For those of you who act carnally, these are all spiritual things, for in Jesus Christ you are doing everything» says Saint Ignatius the God-bearer, thus characterizing the overall reality of the conjugal bond which has been assumed into the Church as a spiritual one, even that very carnal union.

6. The example of Tobias

When the conjugal bond is blessed by God it then enters into the environment of God's love and thereafter acquires a unique, eternal meaning.

In the Old Testament we find a beautiful picture - a wonderful depiction of this fact. It is the marriage of Tobias with Sarah, in the city of Ecbatana of Media.

According to the Old Testament, Sarra - the daughter of Raguel and Edna (relatives of Tobit, Tobias' father) - had been married seven times. Except that an evil demon had consecutively caused the death of all seven husbands during each one's wedding night - that is, before the consummation of the conjugal bond. The Book of Tobit describes Tobias' marriage:

«Then Ragouel called Sarra his daughter. And she came to him. Then taking her hand, he gave her over to him and said, "Take her according to the law, and, according to the decree written in the book of Moyses, she is your wife. Take her and lead her away in good health to your father. And may the God of heaven prosper you both with peace." Then he called her mother and told her to bring a scroll, and he wrote out a contract, a scroll of marriage, that he gave her to him as wife according to the decree of the law of Moyses. After that they began to eat and to drink. Then Ragouel called Edna his wife and said to her, "My sister, prepare the other room, and lead her in there." So she went and made the bed in the room as he had told her, and she led her there. And she wept for her. Then she wiped away the tears and said to her, "Take courage, my daughter; may the Lord of heaven grant you joy in place of your sorrow. Take courage, my daughter." Then she went out. When they had finished eating and drinking, they wanted to go to sleep; so they led the young man out and led him into the room. Then Tobias remembered the words of Raphael, and he took the fish's liver and heart out of the bag where he had them and put them on the embers of the incense. And the odor of the fish became a hindrance, and the demon fled into the upper parts of Egypt. But Raphael went and bound him there hand and foot and tied him up at once. Then they went out and shut the door of the room. And Tobias got up from the bed and said to her, "Sister, get up, let us pray and implore our Lord that he grant us mercy and safety." So, she got up, and they began to pray and implore that safety may be theirs. And he began to say, "Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors, and blessed be your name for all the ages forever. Let the heavens and all your creation bless you for all the ages. You made Adam, and you made for him a helper, a support—his wife Heva. And from the two of them the human race has come. And you said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; let us make for him a helper like himself.' And now not because of lust am I taking this kinswoman of mine, but with sincerity. Grant that I and she may have mercy and that we may grow old together." And they said with each other, "Amen, Amen." Then they went to sleep for the night. But Ragouel got up and called his servants to him, and they went and dug a grave, for he said, "Perhaps he may die, and we may become an object of ridicule and derision." And when they had finished digging the grave, Ragouel went into the house and called his wife, and he said, "Send one of the maids, and have her go in to see if he is alive. But if he is dead, let us bury him so that no one may know." So, they sent the maid and lit the lamp and opened the door, and she went in and found them lying there fast asleep together. And the maid went out and told them that he was alive and that nothing was wrong. So they blessed the God of heaven, and they said, "Blessed are you, O God, with every pure blessing, and may they bless you forever and ever. And blessed are you because you have made me glad, and it did not turn out as I expected, but according to your great mercy you have dealt with us. And blessed are you because you had mercy on two only children. Have mercy on them, O Master, and keep them safe, and bring their life to fulfillment with gladness and mercy." Then he told his domestics to fill in the grave before it became dawn. And he

told his wife to make many loaves of bread, and he went out to the herd and brought two steers and four rams and commanded that they be killed. So they began to make preparations.Then he called Tobias and swore an oath to him and said: "For fourteen days you shall not move from here but shall stay here eating and drinking with me, and you shall make my daughter's spirit glad which has been depressed.» (Tobit 7:12 to 8:20).

Sarra had been married seven times. However, her seven first husbands had obviously not placed their conjugal bond in the spiritual space of the mercy and love of God, Who transforms and animates everything in a person's life. Thus, they were all led to the grave and their bonds to death. They were under the control of the wicked spirit, which sowed death from the very first night of their conjugal life, before the communion between the spouses could be consummated, even at a purely carnal level.

However, Tobias' marriage had from the beginning been placed in a different spiritual space. Sarra's parents and the young husband also had hinged the fulfillment of the purpose of marriage on the mercy and the love of God. Tobias sees as the basic purpose of his marriage to Sarra the communion of love (***Grant that I and she may have mercy and that we may grow old together."***) and the glorification of God's name. And the young wife subscribes to that deep desire of her husband, with her own "Amen". This was the reason the wicked spirit had no longer any place in that young maiden.

Full of gratitude, Ragouel glorifies God, he entrusts the young couple to His love and beseeches Him to complete their lives in good health and joy and mercy, and instructs his servants to cover up the opened grave and celebrates the joyous events for two whole weeks.

7. The purpose of marriage

This continuous course towards the fullness of love is the primary purpose of marriage. A fullness that can exist even between childless couples (cmp.Wisd.Solom. 4:1-6, Wisd.Sirach 16:1-5).

However, the existence of children adds to the Christian marriage a new element: parenthood, which is the overflowing of the love between the two spouses, which will embrace new presences, for which the two spouses are ready to offer everything. In this way, man succeeds in transcending himself to a greater degree, and give himself completely in his love towards the new arrival (cmp.1 Cor.11:8-12, Ephes.5:20-21) and to also prepare himself for that fullness of love which he is called upon to experience eternally.

This sacred purpose of marriage - that is, the transcending of one's self and the fullness of love which begins with conjugal love and is fulfilled in the Kingdom of Heaven - can be observed in the entire Sacred Mystery of marriage, which is replete with symbolisms.

The exchange of rings - which denotes reciprocation and interdependence; the common chalice - which denotes the complete communing of life that is fulfilled during the common partaking in the Divine Eucharist - in the "communion of souls and bodies" under the protective love of God.

«And you, bride», says the Priest at the end of the sacred Liturgy, «may you be magnified like Sarra and delight like Rachel, rejoicing with her own man, guarding the conditions of the law, for God has thus willed» (cmp. Deuter.24:5; Prov.5:18-19).

It is obvious that the purpose of marriage is not accomplished through the attempts of the spouses alone. Its fulfillment is a gift of God. The Holy Spirit, Who acts within the Church and distributes the gifts to the faithful, gives the Christian spouses the gift of marriage (1 Cor.7:7). That is why the Christian marriage is also a sacred mystery.

But as it has become apparent, the Christian marriage is not a private matter of the Christian spouses. The reason is that not only does their place within the corpus of the Church change, and especially within the parish that the newlyweds belong; because, in the parish they are no longer two separate individuals - they are called to live the fullness of conjugal love "in the Lord" and they must express that bond during their entire life within the parish also. Behold why the Christian marriage constitutes an event in the life of a parish and should be performed within that same parish, and not away from the parish!

8. The wedding wreaths

It characteristic, how the sacred mystery of marriage is referred to "coronation" in the Orthodox Church.

We know that victory wreaths belong to the martyrs and the Saints of the Church. This is the reason that halos are depicted in the icons that portray Saints. Our Church however also "crowns" the newlyweds during the sacred ceremony of marriage. Just as a martyr of the faith struggles to the end victoriously and is crowned a victor, thus also are the newlyweds crowned when they enter into the sacred bond of marriage with purity and chastity. They enter into a new arena of struggles - in the spiritual arena of the martyrs of our Church. That is why - during their steps around the small table before them, holding hands and accompanied by the Priest - our Church invokes Holy Martyrs:

«The Holy Martyrs», the laity chants solemnly, «who have struggled well and were crowned», and «glory to Thee, Christ the Lord....the jubilation of Martyrs...! ».

The Church crowns the newlyweds and proceeds to an even more touching act: She prays that God will "take over their marriage wreaths" into His Kingdom, "preserving them spotless and undefiled, and unthreatened, unto the ages of ages" and to crown the couple "with glory and honour".

«O God - our Lord God - Who were present at the Wedding at Canaa and Who blessed the marriage there, bless these, Your servants also, who are being joined in the union of matrimony by Your Providence. Bless their enterings and their exits; fill their lives with good things; take over their marriage wreaths into Your Kingdom, preserving them spotless and undefiled and unthreatened, unto the ages of ages».

Chapter 22 - The Saints of Our Church

1. The Saints' lives as miniatures of Christ's life

«***I am the light of the world***», Christ - as we know - had said; and «***whosoever followeth Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life***» (John 8:12; cmp.12:46). In another place in the Holy Bible Christ is characterized as «***the brightness of His glory***», as the radiance of the Father's glory (Hebr.1:3).

The person that has been illuminated by the uncreated Divine Energies arrives at the «***knowledge of the glory of God in the Person of Jesus Christ***» (2 Cor.4:6). He is rendered a communicant of the divine glory (John 17:22), a participant «***of His holiness***» (Hebr.12:10), the «***light of the world***» (Matth.5:14), the «***glory of Christ***» (2 Cor.8:23). «***But we all», s***ays the Apostle, «***with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory...***» (2 Cor.3:18).

Consequently, every Christian who lives inside the grace of God becomes "together in body" with Christ (Eph.3:6) - that is, a member of his God-human Body; he lives that very life of Christ Himself (Gal.2:20) and radiates the divine light (2 Cor.4:6).

«God is He Who acts within you», says the Apostle Paul, adding that: «***Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world***». (Phil.2:14-15; cmp.Hebr. 13:21).

The Saints of our Church had responded to this calling and lived Christ's life. «***I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me***», the Apostle Paul characteristically says (Gal.2:20). And addressing the Corinthians he says: «***Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ***» (1 Cor.11:1).

They are the «the faithful witnesses of Christ» (Rev.2:13); they are the ones who stand «before the throne and before the Lamb» (Rev.7:9).

The life of all Saints is that same life of Christ, which is repeated in a different manner by each Saint. They are the persons who had lived «by the Spirit» and walked «according to the Spirit» (Gal.5:25). They were "the epistle of Christ... written not in ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God; not on stone tablets, but on the tablets of fleshy hearts» (2 Cor.3:3).

When we study the lives of the Saints, that is when we realize that the dogmas of our Church are not mere intellectual truths; they are the true life of man - the source of the eternal life. Being unites with Christ and bathed in the light of the Holy Spirit, the Saints lived in a miniature scale the very life of Christ. Their thoughts, their words, their works, were all thoughts, words and works if Christ. Their entire life was the fruition of the energies of the Holy Spirit inside their soul.

In this way, the Saints are the «in-Christ new creation» (1 Cor.5:17) - God's new creation, God's works in the spiritual life of man. The life of the Saints of our Church is worthy of the human nature the way it was fashioned by God. This is what allowed them to show us what man truly is, and how he should live.

2. The light of Christ in the life of the Saints

The glory of God is expressed in the Holy Bible with the Uncreatd Light, which reveals the presence and the activity of the Triune God within the world. It is the "flame of fire" that emanates from the throne of God (Dan.7:0) and the light from the burning bush (Exod.3:2 and Acts 7:30-33). It is the glory of God, which like a fire emanates flames atop the summit of the mountain (Exod. 24:17) and is transmitted to Moses, so that no-one is able to look upon his face thereafter (Exod.34:29-30 and 2 Cor.3:7).

The same glory enfolds the Prophet Elijah, who ascends to the heavens «in a storm of fire and in a chariot with fiery horses» (Wisd.Sirach 48:9; 1 Kings 2:11), as well as all of God's people (Isaiah 60:19-20). It is the Uncreated Light, which "shone" later on, upon the shepherds of Bethlehem (Luke 2:9), the Disciples of Christ at the Mount of Transfiguration and had even permeated Christ's very garments (Luke 9:29, Matth.17:2). Later, it flooded with light the Angels that were near the Lord's empty Tomb (Matth.28:3, Mark 16:5, Luke 24:4); it appeared to the first martyr Stephen (Acts 7:55), to the Apostle Paul (Acts 9:3, 22:6-11) and is also imparted to Christ's people (Matth.5:14, John 17:22, 2 Cor.3:18).

This glory of God is presently apparent «***through a mirror, dimly***», as though looking at a reflection, but faintly; however, in the life to come the people of God will behold the full grandeur of divine glory, because they will be seeing God «***face to face***» (1 Cor.13:12), «***the way He is***» (1 John 3:2) and they «***shall shine like the sun***» (Matth.13:43; cmp. Revel.21:9, 22:5; Isaiah 60:19-20).

This glory is foretasted by the Christian within this lifetime. The Apostle Paul reassures the Philippians that Christ «***...will transform our lowly body, that it may be conformed to His glorious body...***» (Philip.3:21) and urges the Corinthians to glorify God, also «***in their body***» (1 Cor.6:20).

The Saints of our Church had foretasted that reality, both during their lifetime, as well as after their in-Christ departure. This of course is not yet the «***unfading crown of glory***» that they will receive when the Chief Shepherd Christ makes His appearance (1 Pet.5:4); however, it is a glimmer of that final glory. «***But the ways of the righteous shine like a light; they proceed and give light until the day is fully dawned***», as the Holy Bible characteristically says (Proverbs 4:18).

Our sacred Books of Saints often tell us of the light which envelops a saint during his lifetime, which innocent children as well as other people were able to see. These instances were the energies of God - the Uncreated Light, as Saint Gregory Palamas tells us - which transforms everything in the Saints' lives.

In the sacred Book of Saints, the Bios of Saint Arsenios mentions: «A certain Elder had come to visit him one day, in order to benefit from the words of the saintly elder. However, on finding the door of his cell closed, he did not knock for fear of disturbing him. Instead, he tried to see through a crack in the door. He then saw the blessed Arsenios transforming into a glowing fire, a sight which left him for a long while wholly terrified».

In the sacred Book of Saints, the Bios of Saint Nectarios mentions: «A certain nun suffering from paralysis of the head approached the Saint as he was officiating during the moment of distribution of the Holy Eucharist, but on noticing that he was glowing with a divine light, she hesitated to go nearer».

When the soul of a person is replete with the Spirit of God - that is, when he actually becomes «***a domicile of God in the Spirit»*** (Eph.2:22), then everything around him becomes bright - even his body and his garments; everything partakes of the glory of God and everything becomes a source of blessings.

The Prophet Elijah was swept up - as we mentioned, in a - «***chariot of fire***», bathed in the Uncreated Light, while his cape, which he left to Elisha became a true source of blessings. (2 Βασιλ. 2,11 και εξής).

Also characteristic is the following excerpt from the conversation between Saint Seraphim of Sarov with Motovilov, according to which, the light that engulfed the Saint is transmitted to his interlocutor:

«How can I know - I asked dear father Seraphim - if I too am in the grace of the Holy Spirit? That is very simple, Filotheos, he replied, because the Lord said that everything is simple for the one who attains knowledge. By remaining in the knowledge, the Apostles could always see if the Spirit of God was with them or not. Thus, by being permeated by the Spirit of God, and having seen His co-presence with them, they proclaim with certainty that their opus is in every way holy and pleasing to God. This explains why the Apostles used to write '***For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us***' (Acts 15:28)

It was therefore on this basis alone that they recommended their Epistles as an unfailing truth, for the benefit of all the faithful. That was how the Holy Apostles could discern within their hearts in a palpable way the presence of the divine Spirit. So, behold, Filotheos, can you see that this is simple?

In spite of all these things, I cannot understand how I can still be wholly certain that I am in the Holy Spirit. How can I detect His actual presence inside me?

The good father Seraphim replied:

I told you Philotheos, that it is quite simple, and I narrated in detail how people can be in the Holy Spirit and in what way we can feel His presence inside us. So, what do you want my child?

I wanted to understand it more fully, I replied.

Then father Seraphim took hold of me firmly by the shoulders and said:

Both of us my child are in the Holy Spirit right now; why don't you look me in the face?

I cannot look upon your face dear father, I replied, because flames are coming out of your eyes and your face is shining even brighter than the sun! My eyes are hurting me!

Do not be afraid, Philotheos, you too are shining now, just like me, and you too have the fullness of the Holy Spirit, because otherwise, you would not have been able to see me like that... ».

3. The virtue of the Saints is transmitted to a-logical nature

«***And it shall be, if by hearing you hear the voice of the Lord your God, to be watchful and to perform all his commandments that I command you today,[...] 3 Blessed be you in the city, and blessed be you in the field. 4 Blessed be the progeny of your belly and the produce of your land, the herds of your cows and the flocks of your sheep. 5 Blessed be your storehouses and your reserves.*** (Deuter.28:1-5).

When a person remains faithful to the love of God by expressing it with his own love - that is, by fulfilling all the commandments - then the grace of God remains within that person; it even overflows towards his entire surroundings and renders them blessed. Man, then feels most profoundly the connection of love with all of creation and expresses that connection in a variety of ways in his life.

Saint Isaac the Syrian used to say that the merciful person «...prays every single moment, with tears, both for a-logical nature as well as for the enemies of the truth and for those who harm him, that they may be preserved and be forgiven. He also prays for the reptiles with his boundless mercifulness which moves inside his heart without measure, thus having resemblance to God».

The Saints feel united with the entire world. They feel that they have a personal responsibility for all of creation and they seek to transform all things and return them to their original unity and harmony. (cmp. Job 5:22-23)

«A humble person approaches deadly beasts», says Abba Isaac, «and as soon as they spot him, their savageness is immediately tamed and they approach him as if he were their master and they wag their head and lick his hands and feet, because they can sense on him the fragrance that Adam exuded prior to his disobedience. And, that which had been taken away from us then, was given back to us by Jesus Christ thanks to His presence on earth, and the scenting of the human race with that fragrance... But even when the demons - with all their audacity and bitterness and all their arrogance - approach the humble person, they become like soil and all of their malice withers and all of their tricks and cunning have no longer any power».

Very touching are the examples of the Saints who experienced the union of oneness and love even with wild animals.

When the ruler of Cappadocia had sent some horsemen to arrest Saint Mamas, he foresaw this event with God's grace, and went out to meet them. Upon meeting, and without the soldiers recognizing that it was the saint, they asked him if he could tell them where to find Mamas. The blessed witness replied: "For the time being my friends you must rest. Therefore, come down off your horses and come with me, and we shall have some food first, then I shall show you Mamas." Thus, they were offered hospitality by the saint, with cheese and bread, and they ate with a hearty appetite whatever that kind man offered them. Then, as was the custom, some wild animals came along to be treated by the saint; whereupon, as soon as the soldiers saw them they were greatly terrified and, abandoning their meal, they ran to the blessed Mamas for his help, but the saint reassured them. Then, in order to relieve them of all concerns, he said to the soldiers: "I am Mamas whom you seek. Therefore, I beseech you to return to Caesaria and I too shall come there right away."

Then there was Saint Gerasimos (of the Jordan), who had a lion as his faithful companion - to which he had in fact assigned the care of his donkey.

Similar events are not only found in the sacred Books of Saints; we can find them in the Holy Bible as well.

For example, it is mentioned that David, in his young years, "***played with lions as with young goats and with bears as with lambs of the flocks."*** (Wisd.Sirach 47:3; cmp. 1 Kings 17:34-37)

Equally characteristic is the story of Daniel, who was thrown into the lion pit and remained entirely untouched by them, for one whole night. However, those same beasts instantly devoured his sycophants, before they could even reach the bottom of that pit. Below is how the Old Testament describes that event:

As is known, in spite of the prohibition by King Darius of the Persians, Daniel prayed to the Lord daily. The wicked advisors, who had contrived to make the King issue an edict with that command in order to eliminate Daniel, betrayed that trusted servant of God to Darius.

The King was sincerely grieved and strived all day to find a way to relieve Daniel of that sentence.

"14And grieving, the king said that Daniel be cast into the lions' pit according to the interdict, [which he established against him]. Then the king grieved exceedingly for Daniel, and he kept assisting to deliver him until sunset from the hands of the satraps.

But those wicked advisors said to the king:

"We adjure you; swear by the decrees of the Medes and Persians that you not change the matter nor that you respect the person nor that you reduce anything of the things said, and you punish the person who did not abide by this interdict." 15And he was unable to deliver him from them.

So, the king ordered that Daniel be brought before him, and be thrown into the lion pit. Then the king said to Daniel:

16Now Darius the king cried out and said to Daniel, "Your God, whom you continually serve thrice a day, he will deliver you from the power of lions! Have courage until morning." 17Then Daniel was thrown into the lions' pit, and a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the pit, and the king sealed it with his signet and with the signets of his nobles so that Daniel might not be removed by them or the king pull him up from the pit. [...] 19 And King Darius rose early in the morning and took the satraps with him. And he went and stood at the opening of the lions' pit. 20Then the king called Daniel in a loud voice with wailing, saying, "O Daniel, are you still alive, and has your God whom you continually serve saved you from the lions, and have they not injured you?" 21Then Daniel heeded the loud voice and said, 22"O king, I am still alive, and the Lord has saved me from the lions, because righteousness was found in me in his presence, and also in your presence, O king, neither ignorance nor sin was found in me. But you listened to people who deceive kings, and you cast me into the lions' pit for destruction." 23Then all the authorities gathered and saw Daniel, how the lions had not bothered him. 24Then these two men who testified falsely against Daniel—they and their wives and their children were cast to the lions. And the lions killed them and shattered their bones, and Daniel was appointed over the whole kingdom of Darius. (Daniel 6:14-24).

These examples, taken from the lives of Holy men, reveal to us that the virtue and love of God's true children is imparted and will find reciprocation in all their environment - even in those very savage beasts. This is the manner in which holy people live reconciliation with the entirety of creation, even from this lifetime of theirs.

This unity of God's creation will be completed in the end times, when " ***wolves and lambs shall feed together, and a lion shall eat straw like an ox, but a snake bshall eatb earth as bread! They shall not do wrong or destroy on my holy mountain, says the Lord***." (Isaiah 65:25).

4. The opposite situation in the lives of wicked people

The exemplary punishment of Daniel's sycophants - that is, the lions' aggressive stance - is in complete harmony with the Spirit of the Old Testament:

"***15 And it shall be, if you do not listen to the voice of the Lord your God to keep and to do all his commandments, which I command you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you: 16 Cursed be you in the city, and cursed be you in the field. 17 Cursed be your storehouses and your***

reserves. 18 Cursed be the progeny of your belly and the produce of your land, the herds of your cows and the flocks of your sheep" (Deut.28:15-18; cmp.Isaiah 24:3-7, Jerem.7:20).

Wicked people relay their wickedness and their malice to their entire environment - even to lifeless objects. (Jud.23)

When Kores revolted against the hieratic class that God had instituted, the Israelites received the command from God to remove themselves from the camps and the belongings of the mutineers, so that they would not be destroyed. "***26And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Be separated from the tents of these stubborn men, and do not touch anything of all that is theirs, lest you too perish in all their sin***." (Num.16:26).

In the life of the blessed Hilarion the Great is mentioned the case of an avaricious man, who had transmitted his wickedness to the chick-peas in his garden.

This greedy man sought the forgiveness of the Saint and so he asked for the intercession of the Saint's disciples - and in fact his most beloved one, Hesychios. In order to extract even greater sympathy, he also brought the Saint a small quantity of chick-peas in view of their friendship. "As for Hesychios", says the sacred Book of Saints, "being a prudent man, did not tell the Saint who had brought them, but merely placed them on the table. But he, (because he had the Lord Jesus Christ in his heart, who revealed hidden things to him), discerned the whole situation and looking at Hesychios sternly, said to him: "Do you not sense that these have the stench of avarice, but have brought them to the table?" Hesychios humbly replied: "I did not perceive any stench whatsoever, my precious father." To which the Saint replied: "Give them to the cattle, so that you may see I am not lying". So, as soon as he placed the chick-peas before the cattle, they turned their heads away and bellowed as though they had seen something terrible and a big monstrosity."

5. The prayers of the Saints

"***How am I to deal with you, O Ephraim? Shall I shield you, O Israel? How am I to deal with you? Shall I make you like Adama and like Seboim?"*** (cmp.Deut.29:22). ***My heart was changed together; my sense of regret was disturbed. 9 I will not do according to the anger of my wrath; I will not abandon Ephraim to be wiped out; for I am divine and not human, holy in your midst, and I will not enter into a city."*** (Hosee 11:8-9).

In these words by God we notice how His divine love, which enfolds the Saints, saves an entire city (also cmp.Gen.18:23, 32; Judith 8:31); that is, the entire population of the city is spared, thanks to the tender bond of brotherly love between Holy people.

And yet, "***love never fails***" - it will never cease to exist (1 Cor.13:8). A tender bond of brotherly love is what unites us "with all the Saints" - with the entire Triumphant Church.

The Apostle Paul characteristically says that "***39 And all they, even after giving good witness for their faith, did not receive the promise; 40 for God had provided something better for us, so that they should not reach perfection without us."*** (Hebr.11:39-40).

And here is a beautiful picture from John's Book of Revelation, which testifies about the close ties between the Saints and the struggling Church:

«***9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed***.» (Rev. 6:9-11).

This moving picture in Revelation shows us just how united the Saints are with us, and how much they participate in our joy and our sorrow (cmp.also Luke 15:7), by interceding for us before the throne of God.

Each Orthodox Christian can address his personal prayers to any member of the Church in heaven, be it a recognized saint or not. As observed by a contemporary Orthodox theologian, it would be very natural for an orphan child to invoke not only the intercession of the Lord's Mother and the Saints', but also the intercessions of its own parents. However, during common worship, the Church normally addresses Her supplications only to those who are recognized as Saints.

6. Does God heed the prayers of the Saints?

When we study the Holy Bible, we are especially impressed by God's familiarity with saintly people, as well as God's sensitivity - one could say - towards His devoted children. For example, we see Abraham negotiating with God for the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah, to such an extent that he kept making suggestions to God and God accepting them (Gen.18:23-33).

God said to Moses: ***"9'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.' 10And now allow me, and, enraged with anger against them, I will destroy them and make you into a great nation."***

And that holy man replies to Him with those charming words, which reveal to us all the familiarity and the simplicity of his relationship with God:

11 And Moyses prayed before the Lord his God and said, "Why, Lord, are you enraged with anger against your people, whom You brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and an uplifted arm?" (Exod.32:9-11). the Holy Bible tells us that God heeded that supplication by Moses and did not punish the people. (Exod.32:14; cmp. Psalm.105:23). The will, therefore, of "***all who fear Him He will do, and to their petition he will hearken and will save them.***" (Psalm 144:19; cmp.: Job 42:7-8; Gen.20:17).

In Jeremiah is mentioned that God will forgive the entire city of Jerusalem, if there were even one righteous person in it: "***Go about in the streets of Ierousalem, and see, and take note, and search in its squares, if there be found one who practices justice and seeks faithfulness, and I will be gracious to them, says the Lord.***" (Jerem.5:1; cmp. Ezek.22:30).

But, is it possible that God only heeds the prayers of Saintly people, if they are living in this lifetime? The Holy Bible tells us that the Saints in heaven also pray to God for their brethren and that through their intercessions, miracles are wrought. In this way, we see that Elisha - in spite of having received a "***double portion***" of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings 2:9), he did not succeed in dividing the water of the Jordan river by

striking it with Elijah's mantle. However, the water did part, when he struck it again and invoked the name of Elijah (2 Kings 2:14)

Judas the Maccabee sees the high priest Onias with his arms uplifted towards heaven, praying fervently for the entire Judean race. Then in the similar manner he happened upon another - a very well-respected elder, of whom Onias reassures us: "***"This man is the one who loves his brothers, who prays much for the people and the holy city—Ieremias, the prophet of God."***" (2 Macc.15"12-14). However, examples such as these we do not only encounter in the Old Testament. John the Apostle "sees" the prayers of the Saints in the form of golden vials filled with incense - that is, as something valuable in the eyes of God. (Rev.5:8) He furthermore "sees" God fulfilling His promise to the Saints and also fulfilling their petition to avenge their brethren. But before that, with the "sealing" of the righteous the protection of their brethren who are struggling on earth is secured, so that they too might receive the crown of victory:

«***3 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake***» (Rev.8:3-5).

We observe therefore that through the prayers of the Saints, the response comes directly from the altar and the throne of God for the punishment of evil and the instruments of evil, and for the restoration of God's order in the world. One could in fact say that the fate of the entire world rests in the hands of the Saints, as also the salvation of the struggling terrestrial Church (cmp. Matth.19:28, 1 Cor.6:2).

In this passage, we also notice that the prayers of the Saints are carried by angels to the throne of God, and are offered as a spiritual form of sacrifice upon the celestial altar (cmp.Tobit 12:12-15; Zechar.1:12).

Certain people encounter difficulties in this matter and deny the intercession of the Saints of our Church. How - they ask - is it possible that the Saints actually hear us? Are they omnipresent?

We do not know in what manner the Saints are informed of the events in our lives. What we do know with certainty, however, is that they pray for us and that their prayers reach the throne of God.

On the basis of the aforementioned verses of Revelation, we could say - using a more human expression - that God is especially "sensitive" to the prayers of the Saints. All of us can also be sure that "with all the Saints" we too are joined together in the Body of Christ; that each one of us comprises an living cell of that Body, and subsequently that each of us belongs to the other and is able and obliged to express that fact of brotherly bonding in a variety of ways.

This is expressed in the life of the Church, and especially in the divine Liturgy, where the fullness of the Church is actualized in the best manner.

«Moreover, we offer You this logical worship for the entire universe», prays the priest after the sanctification of the Precious Gifts; «for the Holy, catholic (=overall) and Apostolic Church... ». And elsewhere he adds: «... Having commemorated all of the Saints, let us appose ourselves and each other and our entire life to Christ the Lord...». After commemorating all of the Saints, let us entrust ourselves, let us entrust one another and our entire life to Christ, Who is our true God...

7. The feast-days of the Saints

«Lord, with the commemoration of Your Saints, all of creation celebrates. The heavens rejoice together with the angels, and the earth delights together with the people».

On the day of their death the Saints participate "in the first resurrection". Over these, the second death has no power, which is why they are characterized as "blessed" and "Saints" (Rev.20:6)

Consequently, the death of a Saint is a huge event; that is why it is not celebrated only by people but also by the angels and "all of creation".

From the very first centuries our Church has characterized the date of a Saint's demise as the Saint's "Birthday" and commemorates it "with joy and jubilation", "in memory of those who had struggled before our time, as well as the ascesis and preparation of those who in the future are going to struggle" (Book of Martyrs by Saint Polycarp †156)

This proto-Christian tradition continues to be observed by the Orthodox Church up to this day, by honouring the memory of the Saints with celebrations and festivals, as well as many other events linked to their lives and God's grace, which acts through His Saints (the translation of Saints' holy relics, the anniversary of a miracle etc..)

8. Christ, the only Saviour

When we honour the Saints, when we beseech them to intercede to God for our sake in the same manner that we would intercede for a living brother of ours, accordingto the example of the Apostles (Colos.4:3, 1 Thess.5:25, 2 Thess.3:1, Hebr.13:18), it does not mean that our salvation is dependent on them. The One Who shows mercy and saves man is Christ, "Who rose from the dead, the true God, Who is benevolent and merciful and loves mankind".

The Holy Mother, the angels and the Saints do not save man; they "intercede" for him, they "give him strength", they "protect" him, and they relay their prayers and supplications to God, for the sake of their brethren and co-servants.

This, therefore, is the faith of the Orthodox. Faith in the one and only Saviour Christ and faith in the love of Christ's people - the Saints - who are the living images of Christ and the Holy Trinity.

This is excellently expressed in the prayer of our Church: "Glory to You, o Christ our God, our hope, glory to You, Who have risen from the dead, our true God, by the intercessions of His Most Immaculate and Most Pure Holy Mother, by the power of the precious and life-giving Cross, and the protection of the precious, heavenly, incorporeal powers, the supplications of the precious, glorious, prophet and forerunner and Baptist, John.... and all the Saints, have mercy and save us, as the benevolent and philanthropist and merciful God."

9. The Holy angels

«By Your Cross, Christ, Angels and people have become one flock, and the Heavens and earth one Church, and are rejoicing, Lord; glory to You».

This hymn of Wednesday laudations of the First Tone presents the unity of angels and people, on the basis of the Lord's Body.

So, the Holy Angels therefore also belong to our family, "in Christ". Through Christ's crucifixional sacrifice, they became stabilized in virtue and remain faithful to their original Mission, which is glorification (Isaiah 6:3 and Luke 2:14) and functional-liturgical.

The Apostle Paul characteristically says that they are «***ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation***" (Hebr.1:14).

Thus, because of the Angels' participation in the one Body of Christ - that is, in the Church - but also because of their special ministry of serving the mystery of our salvation, they are closely linked to us and they rejoice whenever a person returns to Christ and lives the life of piety. (Luke 15:10).

«They - the Angels - are sent forth in the world to those who are to believe in You, as guardians of the salvation of the pious, looking after Your servants, o Saviour" says a Monday hymn of the Third Tone.

The Holy Bible informs us that every Christian has his own angel (Gen.48:16, Exod.23:20; Tobit 5:4, Psalms 33:8, Daniel10:13 & 20, Matth.18:10, Acts 12:15), whom he can - consequently - call upon in his prayer:

«Holy Angel, who stands by my wretched soul and afflicted life, do not abandon me the sinner, nor stay away from me because of my intemperance... ».

Chapter 23 - The Holy Icons

1. The prohibition by the Old Testament

It is well known that in the Old Testament the fashioning and worship of idols is strictly forbidden:

«***You shall not make for yourself an idol or likeness of anything whatever is in heaven above and whatever is in the earth beneath and whatever is in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not do obeisance to them, nor are you to serve them, for I am the Lord your God...***" (Exod.20:4-5). "

You shall not follow after idols, and you shall not make gods of cast metal for yourselves; I am the Lord your God." (Levit.19:4).

"***I am the Lord your God. You shall make for yourselves nothing made by hand nor carved, neither erect a stele of your own, nor shall you place a stone as a landmark in your land, to do obeisance to it; it is I who am the Lord your God"*** (Levit.26:1).

How must we interpret these verses?

Some heterodox distinguish between the first segment of the verses and the second, and thus misinterpret them. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the weightiest point of significance is precisely in the words: "***it is I, who am the Lord your God***"

In other words, these verses wish to state that the only true God is the God of Israel, and not the false gods of the Gentiles: "***...because all the gods of the nations are idols, but our God made the sky***.", as the Old Testament characteristically underlines (1 Chron.16:26).

"***...because all the gods of the nations are demons, but the Lord made the heavens.***" (Psalms 95,5).

"***Thus, says God, the king of Israel who delivered him, God Sabaoth: I am first and I am after these things; except for me, there is no God***." (Isaiah 44:6).

After a statement such as this, it was impossible for the Israelites to manufacture and worship the gods of the Gentiles: "***You shall not do obeisance to their gods nor serve them. You shall not act according to their practices, but with demolition shall demolish and by smashing shall smash their*** (idol) ***steles. And you shall serve the Lord your God, and I will bless your bread and your wine and your water, and I will turn away sickness from you***." as characteristically stressed in the Holy Bible (Exod.23:24-25).

Any transgression of this commandment had very severe consequences for the entire Israelite nation (3 Kings 9:6-7) and it was considered a crime punishable by death (Exod.22:20; Deut.17:2-7), even for those who would prompt another person into this kind of worship (Deut.13:6-11).

Worship of the one and only true God leaves no margins for other gods and cast idols (3 Kings 9:6-9; 14:9-10; Joshua 23:15-16; 1 Kings 7:3, 8:8; Jerem.1:16, 2:27; Malach.2:11).

The God of Israel is "zealous" - that is, the one and only. "***They made me zealous with what is no god, provoked me with their idols***" - that is, they were the cause of My becoming zealous, because they worshipped a nonexistent god; they aggravated Me to anger, because they worshipped idols (Deut.32:21. Cmp. Exod.20:5; 34:14; Deut.4:24; 5:9; 6:15).

This uniqueness of God is also stated by His name, which God Himself had given to Moses: "I am the One Who Is" (Exod.3:14). In the Hebrew text there is the phrase "I Am He Who Is" **(’eh-yeh אֶהְיֶה ’ă-šer אֲשֶׁר ’eh-yeh אֶהְיֶה)** which is related to the verb **’eh-yeh**, which means «I am», «I exist», «I become», «I happen».

Hence, this name declares the absolute existence of God. He is the true existence, the true life (Jerem.2:13). He is the One Who brought His people out of Egypt and to Him belongs glory and worship. He is the one and only God. All the other "gods" are in actual fact "not gods" (Deut.32:21; 1 Kings 12:21; 19:18. 2 Chron.13:9; Jerem.2:11; 5:7); in other words, nonexistent. They must not be glorified, nor be worshipped. "***I am the Lord God*** (Jahwe)***; this is my name; my glory I will not give to another, nor my praises to the graven images***" God had said to the Prophet Elijah (Isaiah 42:8)

In spite of all the extremely strict measures, the danger of idolatry (for a nation that was surrounded by idolaters) is surprisingly a big one. We must not forget that Israel had often fallen into apostasy, had fashioned idols and worshipped them instead of the true God. Examples of such apostasies are described

in the Old Testament (Exod.32:4-5; 3 Kings 12:28; Judges 2:13, 3:6, 4:1, 10:16; 1 Macc.1:15 e.a.) and in particular by the Prophets, who had forewarned about terrible punishments as a consequence of such an apostasy (ref.Hos.2:7-15; Isaiah 40:10-20, 46:1-7; Jerem.2:5-13, 27:28, 10:1-16, 16:20 e.a.).

This is the reason it was imperative to be reminded each time of the danger, and the duty to worship the one and only God be underlined: "***3Now hear, O Israel, and be watchful to perform so that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has spoken, to give you a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 And these are the statutes and the judgments, which the Lord commanded to the sons of Israel in the wilderness as they were coming out from the land of Egypt. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord. 5And you shall love the Lord your God with the whole of your mind and with the whole of your soul and with the whole of your power. 6And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart and in your soul. 7And you shall teach them to your sons and talk on them while sitting at home and going on the road and lying down and rising up. 8And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be things unshakable before your eyes, 9and you shall write them on the doorposts of your houses and of your gates. 10 And it shall be, whenever the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraam and Isaak and Iakob, to give you large and fine cities that you did not build, 11houses full of all sorts of goods that you did not fill, dug cisterns that you did not dig out, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. And when you eat and become full, 12take care for yourself, lest you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a house of slavery. 13The Lord your God you shall fear, and him you shall serve, and to him you shall cling, and by his name you shall swear. 14Do not go after other gods from the gods of the nations around you, 15because the Lord your God, who is present with you, is a jealous god. Lest the Lord your God, being angered with wrath against you, destroy you utterly from the face of the earth***..." (Deut.6:3-15).

"***Be ashamed with shame, you who trust in the graven images, who say to the cast images: "You are our gods"***." (Isaiah 42:17).

"***20 Instead, as a woman is faithless toward her mate, so the house of Israel was faithless toward me, says the Lord. 21 From lips was heard a voice of weeping and of pleading of Israel's sons, because they did wrong in their ways, they forgot their holy God. 22 Return, o sons who are given to turning, and I will heal your fractures. "We here will be yours, because you are the Lord, our God. 23 Truly the hills and the power of the mountains were a delusion, but through the Lord, our God, is the salvation of Israel"." (***Jerem.3:20-23).

2. The venerated objects in the Old Testament

In spite of the above, there did also exist in the Old Testament certain objects that were manufactured on God's command, upon which the Israelites bestowed honour. It is in the written word of God (Exod.34:1). They are various "likenesses", for whose manufacture God had given very specific instructions: The Ark of the Covenant (Exod.25:9-21), the table of offerings (Exod.25:22-29), the sacrificial altar (Exod.27:1-8; 30; 1-10), the bronze washbasin (Exod.30:17-21), the tent of witness (Exod.26:1-37) and other items (cmp. also Exod.35:11 etc.)

However, that which is most impressive is God's instruction for the manufacture of various other "likenesses": of angels, of animals, of plants, and in fact likenesses intended for a space of worship. Thus, we notice that upon God's instructions, two Cherubim with open wings spread above the Propitiatory are fashioned (Exod.25:17-19; cmp. Hebr.9:5), as well as two more giant Cherubim, that were placed in the

Holy of Holies in the Temple of Solomon (3 Kings 6:23-28; cmp. 2 Chron.3:10-12, 5:8; Ezek.9:3, 10:2 etc.). Also fashioned were various other representations, such as the bronze likenesses of 12 oxen (3 Kings 7:13), carved representations of lions and other bas-relief representations (3 Kings 7:16, 22, 28, 30; 2 Chron.4:3 etc.).

All of the aforementioned prove to us that with His command "you shall never make **for yourself** any idol or image", God does not forbid the **use** of objects that are intended for worship. Idols are forbidden, but not the symbols and objects used during worship, to which one does **not** bestow worship or honour per se; that is, if they are entirely independent of any association with the living God. Our worship belongs to Him alone.

"***Be ashamed with shame, you who trust in the graven images, who say to the cast images,"You are our gods."***" (Isaiah 42:17).

Photograph of the Judean Synagogue in Dura Europos.

The murals date back to 235 A.D. It was discovered in 1921.

3. The Christological basis of Holy Icons

In the Old Testament God was revealed through His uncreated divine energies, and especially through the mouths of the Prophets (Acts 3:21; 2 Tim.3:16; 1 Pet.1:10-12; 2 Pet.1:21). However, during the New Testament period, the Logos of God "***became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory***" (John 1:14). The Father Himself was revealed to mankind, through the Person of the Son (John 14:9) and thence embarked on a personal relationship with us. This is why we can now depict God, in the Person of Christ.

"In older times", Saint John of Damascus tells us, "God could not be depicted at all, because He had not received a body or a form. But now that God revealed Himself with flesh and associated with humans, I can depict whatever I can see of God: Him, who became matter and condescended to dwell within matter. And I shall never cease to respect matter, by which my salvation was accomplished."

What we do depict, however, is not Christ's divine nature, but - as Saint Theodore the Studite says - His hypostasis, the fact of Christ's Person, Who is the "***image of the invisible God***" (Colos.1:15; 1 Cor.4:4; Wisd.Solom.7:26). Accordingly, the image is a visible sign of God's invisible presence, verifying that very presence among people (cmp. John 14:9). The veneration, therefore, of images (icons) hinges on the most basic and salvific dogma of our faith: the incarnation of Christ and His actual presence among us. By believing in the actual incarnation of Christ and His presence as a human, we also proclaim this fact, by venerating icons.

An icon constitutes a confession of faith in the God-human status of Christ and directs us to the original: to Christ Himself. At the same time however, an icon also expresses man's profound inner desire to reach the height of the God-human Christ and is an excellent motive for man's inner turnabout towards the God-man Jesus.

The aforementioned help us to better understand the immense danger that one can encounter when denying the veneration of Holy icons. It is the danger of denial of Christ's incarnation as well as the entire event of Divine Providence. For that person, who denies the depiction of Him who "***dwelt among us***" and Whose "***glory we have seen***" (John 1:14), the Church - the Body of Christ - ceases to have a God-human character and consequently is unable to offer salvation to mankind. The denial therefore of icons - which are the visible and palpable witness of the incarnation of Christ and of the fact of man's salvation within His Body - has catastrophic consequences for mankind. This is the reason that our Church relates the Orthodox Faith to the veneration of icons and why She names the first Sunday of Great Lent the "Sunday of Orthodoxy", on which day we celebrate the restoration of Holy icons. No-one can be called an Orthodox Christian if they do not honour the Orthodox icons!

But all of the above do not imply that we Orthodox regard an icon as the per se subject being depicted on it, and that we worship the wood and the paints which comprise the image, in place of God, Who is the original. An icon is a "point of reference"; it is not the original subject. But, as Saint John of Damascus mentions, "wherever the point of reference is, there too is the one being portrayed" That is the reason we honour the icon, but without bestowing on it the status of the person being portrayed. The Saint himself characteristically mentions that whoever deifies an icon is anathematized. (cmp. Isaiah 42:17)

This is, after all, the teaching of our Church, as formulated in the 7th Ecumenical Council: that is, we afford the icons "salutations and honorary veneration, but not actual worship, which is befitting only to the Divine nature."

Whosoever affords worship to Holy icons and does not intend it for God, he does not remain faithful to that decision of the Ecumenical Council and is condemned by the Holy Bible, because he is worshipping "***idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood***, ***which can neither see nor hear nor walk*** (Revel.9:20); "***...works of human hands. A mouth they have and will not speak; eyes they have and will not see. Ears they have and will not hear; nostrils they have and will not smell. Hands they have and will not feel; feet they have and will not walk about; they will not articulate in their throats. May those who make them become like them,and all who trust in them!***" (Psalms 113:12-16. Cmp. Psalms 134:15-21).

4. The icons of the Saints of our Church

The Orthodox Church does not only venerate the icon of Christ, but also the icons of the Saints.

In the Old Testament there is no mention of this matter. Throughout that entire period, it was not possible to depict the true nature of man, who was created in accordance with the image of God. No-one at the time could see the image of God - man - in all its purity. This was because all humans had inherited Adam's nature - that is, the image of God in its fallen and deteriorating state, wretched and changed...

In order to acquaint ourselves with how a true human is, in the person of those who bear the image of God unspoiled, it was necessary first of all that Christ be incarnated - that is, He had to "vacate Himself" by taking on a servile form, and making Himself alike to humans (Phil.2:7); the "***first-born brother***" (Rom.8:29, Coloss.1:18; Psalms 88:28), in order to render them once again "***according to the image of***" Himself (Rom.8:29; cmp.Phil.3:21).

The Saints of our Church, who had responded to God's call, had become "conformant to the image of the Son"; they donned once again the "***image of the Heavenly one***" (1 Cor.15:49) and thus reflected His glory (2 Cor.3:18).

Therefore, the icons of the Saints of our Church do not depict the fallen state of man, but the "new man" (Ephes.2:15, 4:24) and to the reality of man's entry into the "new aeon" (cmp.Isaiah 65:14-17, 66:22; 2 Pet.3:13; Revel.21:5). Holy icons refer to the world of God's new creation (2 Cor.5:17; Gal.6:15), the transformation that one cannot perceive with one's bodily senses. It is the sanctified world by God's grace, as Saint John of Damascus says; the witness and the true presence of the transformed world and the guarantee of its total transformation according to the promise of the Lord (2 Pet.3:13; Revel.21:5).

The person who has been "Christified" reflects - as we mentioned - "the Lord's glory" and is transformed "into the same image as His, from glory to glory" - a fact that originates from the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor.3:18). That is why the Saints of our Church were radiant figures even in this lifetime - except that not all people could perceive with their senses the glory of the Saints. It is the holy icons of our Orthodox Church that testify to that world. Those who do not live the life of the Spirit within a perpetual Pentecost cannot -of course- perceive the meaning of Holy icons and discern in them the metamorphosis of man and of the entire world. This reality is experienced by the faithful within the Church, and no-one has the right to deprive their senses of their participation in a spiritual joy.

"The Apostles had beheld the Lord with their physical eyes and others had seen the Apostles, while others also had seen the martyrs", as Saint John of Damascus characteristically says. "And I too desire to see them, with the eyes of my soul and my body... it is because I am a human and am enveloped by a body that I desire to communicate with holy things and see them", he adds.

The continuing presence of Holy icons is an excellent means of communication with the Saints, who are no longer regarded as personalities from a distant past, but as our contemporaries and personal friends of the faithful.

5. The iconographers of our Church

When planning to draw an image of Christ or the Most Holy Mother, sacred iconographers had to previously fast and had to live a life of intense ascesis, complete dedication and prayer. That way, they acquired the necessary spiritual experiences, which they then expressed with colours - something reminiscent of Moses' revelation:

As we have seen, Moses remained for forty days and nights on the mountain; he lived with intense ascesis and with closeness to God (Exod.24:15-18); then, having been illuminated by the Uncreated Light of the Triadic Godhead, he descended the mountain in order to fulfill God's commands (Exod.34:30).

With the above, we can understand why we cannot call just anyone an iconographer if they do not have those inner spiritual experiences; which is why their works are mere paintings or imitations of sacred icons that were created by others, who had been guided by the Spirit of God. On the other hand, the iconographers of our Church were well aware that the icons were not their own works but works of the Holy Spirit. All they did was to lend their hands. This is why they do not inscribe their names on Holy icons, but instead, write "by the hand of....." - in other words, with their hand, which they had loaned to the Holy Spirit to direct it. They believed that the grace of God, which restores man's corroded image, also guides their hand so that it can depict the restored image of the living God.

They also believed that the icons that were produced as a result of inner experiences did not express the states pertaining to this life, but states of the transformed world. This is the reason the manner in which the Saints, the animals, the vegetation and all of creation are portrayed in icons is not a "natural" one. Holy icons do not express the "natural" states of this world, but rather the spiritual experiences of our Church for a transformed world, which returns to its original splendor - to the "***glorious liberty of the children of God***" (Rom.8:21).

Chapter 24 - The Precious Cross

1. The foreshadowing of the Cross in the Old Testament

As we know, the Orthodox Church bestows a special honour to the precious Cross, whose mention She has discovered even in the Old Testament.

The Fathers of the Church do not stop at the foreshadowing of Christ in the person of Adam and of the Holy Virgin in the person of Eve. They relate the "wood" (tree) in the Garden of Eden - which had become the symbol of the catastrophic Fall - to the "wood" of the life-giving Cross, which became the symbol of victory against the Serpent.

The life-giving power of the Cross also presents itself in the description of Moses' staff, which turned the bitter water sweet (Exod.15:25). The Holy Bible further mentions: "***Was not water made sweet from wood in order that his strength might be known?***" (Wisdom Sirach 38:5).

The Apostle Paul makes reference to this point and underlines that when the Israelites drank from that water, they drank of a "***spiritual drink***", which sprang "***from the spiritual rock, which followed them***"; and that "***that rock was Christ***", he added (1 Cor.10:4).

Thus, when we honour the precious Cross, we do not drink of the "bitter water" - we do not refer to the instrument of death; rather, we taste of the "spiritual drink", which springs from the "spiritual rock" - from the victor over death and triumphant Lord. This event is a source of strength and power for all the faithful - against the devil, to whom belonged the power of death (Hebr.2:14) - as well as against death itself - man's final enemy (1 Cor.15:26).

We also see the power of the precious Cross in the bronze serpent that Moses had lifted up. According to God's instruction, whosoever looked upon that serpent was cured of poisonous snake bites (Num.21:8). That bronze serpent is characterized as a "***symbol of salvation***" (Wisd.Solom.16,6) which undoubtedly draws its strength from the same source that animates the Precious Cross: "***And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.***" (John 3:14-15). There is no doubt that it is the same symbol of victory and triumph that Ezekiel had also seen...

He said that he saw a man in splendid attire, who gave the command that everyone be given "***the mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and have been afflicted over all the lawless acts that happen in their midst"*** (Ezek.9:4. Cmp.Revel.7:3-4).

With all the above it has become obvious that the foreshadowings in the Old Testament did not only refer to the event of Christ's crucifixional sacrifice, but also to that very "sign" of the Cross - the "sign of the Son of man" which would again appear as a banner of victory during the triumphant advent of the Lord. (Matth.24:30).

2. The power of the Cross

«Rejoice, o life-bearing cross - the invincible trophy of piety, the gate of Paradise, the support of the faithful, the enclosure of the Church - by which the curse was dispelled and abolished, the power of death trodden down, and by which we were lifted from the earth to the heavens; o invincible weapon, opponent of demons, glory of holy martyrs, truly an adornment, a harbor of salvation, who granted the world the greatest mercy."

This hymn of Cross-Venerating Sunday very characteristically expresses the place of the Precious Cross in the life of the Church and each faithful.

The Cross is no longer a symbol of death and shame (Deut.21:23), but a source of life everlasting. By the Cross the curse disappeared and was abolished and the archon of death conquered - that is, the devil. Consequently, it comprises the invincible weapon of the Church. It is the formidable opponent of demons, it is the glory of the martyrs and the Saints of the Church, the harbor of salvation and the adornment of the faithful.

«I have hearkened, Lord, to the hearing of the dynasty of Your Cross, for with it, Paradise was opened", chants our Church.

The Cross of the Lord expresses the limitless love of God and at the same time, the limitless value of mankind. There is not greater expression of God's love than the Cross, just as there is no greater elevation of mankind than the event of the Cross (John 15:13; Rom.5:8). So great is the value of mankind in the eyes of God, that for the sake of his salvation, God Himself was lifted onto the Cross. We can consequently understand why the Cross is the safe guarantee of God's limitless compassion, as well as man's outspokenness before the throne of God.

Christ's death on the Cross signifies the death of the old world and His resurrection the commencement of the new age of metamorphosis - that is, the period of salvation of the entire world.

The Apostle Paul mentions that through the Cross the reconciliation between man and God came about, and that in Christ a "new man" was created. He characteristically says that "through the Cross" the Lord put enmity to death (Ephes.2:15-16); that through the Blood of Christ we have "***boldness to enter the Holies***" (Εβραίους 10,19). In this manner, we could see the Cross as the center of God's entire new creation.

" But Jesus Himself answered them, saying, "***The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified***", in reference to His being lifted up onto the Cross (John 12:23).

When we study the sacred text carefully, we shall see that the Lord actually characterizes His ascent on the Cross as an elevation, as a glory, as a triumph against sin and death:

"***24Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. 25 He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.27 "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose did I come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." 29 Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." 30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."33 This He said, signifying by what death He would die."*** (John12:24-33. see also John13:31-38, Luke24:26).

These words of the Lord do not only prove the reality of the passion and the agony of the Cross; they also present the event of the crucifixion as a "lifting up" and a glorification of "the Son of Man" - as the starting point and the centre of glory of the human race.

It is not an weak, helpless man upon the Cross; it is the Godman Jesus - He Who descends into Hades as victor and and triumphant conqueror, Who abolishes the realm of death and Hades in order free man from the bonds of death and to induct him into the realm of life.

The Cross therefore and the death of Christ do not comprise a weakness, but a strength. The death of the Lord is characterized in the Holy Bible as a "sleeping lion", which conserves its formidable strength, both during sleep and after it. This is the reason no-one dares to wake it: "***When you reclined, you slept like a lion and like a whelp. Who will rouse him?*** " (Gen.49:9). " ***Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out***." (John12:31), as Christ had said, thus placing the event of the Cross at the

centre of a universal tribunal. He rendered the Cross a measure and gnomon of triumph or condemnation of mankind - depending on each person's stance towards the Cross. As has been said, in the persons of the two robbers (next to the Cross) all of mankind is represented and judged: not on the basis of their actions, but based on the dispositions of people towards the crucified Godman. The grateful robber confesses Christ. He does not regard Him as a fellow-sufferer like us humans, that is, as a robber. He confesses Him as King, as Lord and God. That is why he invoked His mercy. By doing so, the grateful robber becomes a true theologian and saint - the first saint of our Church - showing all of us the path of true spirituality, the path towards salvation, which is the path of the Cross.

The ungrateful robber perceives the Lord as a common mortal and His Cross as a symbol of disdain and mockery. That is why he even "***blasphemed Him***" (Luke 23:29). He hoped for nothing from the Lord. He had always been a robber from the past, but he did not want to depend his salvation on Him, Who was raised upon the Cross in order to attract all grateful robbers to Him.

This wondrous truth is expressed in an unprecedented manner by a hymn of our Church:

"In the midst of two robbers, Your Cross was found to be a balance of righteousness: the one (robber) being led down into Hades, burdened by his blasphemy, and the other (robber), relieved of offenses, being led up towards knowledge of Theology; Christ our God, glory to You."

3. The sign of the Cross

When we make reference to the Cross of the Lord, we do not refer only to the event of the Crucifixion, but also to the precious wood of the Cross. Because, as Saint John of Damascus characteristically mentions, by being in contact with the Precious Body of the Lord, the wood of the Cross is also sanctified. That is why honour and veneration also befits the Cross. "Not only the reference to the Cross and the Mystery" says Saint Gregory Palamas; "but also the form itself is divine and deserving of veneration, for it is a venerable, sanctifying and finalizing seal for all the wondrous and inexpressible gifts that come from God."

It is necessary to underline this, because - as the Apostle mentions - there are the "***enemies of the Cross***" (Philip.3:18) These "enemies of the Cross" exist in our times also; for this reason, it must be clarified why the Cross of the Lord is not a shame (cmp.Deut.21:23) but on the contrary, a "boast" (Gal.6:14) - and this, as we said, does not refer only to the event itself, but also to the Precious Cross.

The Cross is an image of the crucified Christ, and it draws its power and its grace from the passions of Christ.

This is the reason that sealing with the sign of the Cross is the external sign of all -without exception- the sacred mysteries of the Church, by which man's salvation is realized. This is certainly not about some kind of magical instrument; it is about the life-giving force of the divine energies. This force is not transmitted by the sign of the Cross per se; it is the fact of the Cross's association with the Person of Christ. Besides, this is what applied in the case of the bronze serpent: "***7For the one who turned was not saved because of what was beheld, but because of you, the savior of all. 8And in this also you convinced our enemies that you are the one who rescues from every evil***." (Wisd.Solom.16:7-8).

The Israelites had not comprehended this truth which is why they sought to bestow worship on the bronze serpent, when worship belongs to God alone. For this reason, "***4He removed the high places and smashed all the steles and utterly destroyed the groves and the bronze snake that Moyses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel had been making incense offerings to it, and he called it Neesthan."*** (4 Kings 18:4).

The sign of the Cross expresses the presence of the Lord in the life of the faithful and the Church, and comprises the symbol of victory and triumph over sin and death (Ephes.2:16). Thus, the sign of the Precious Cross is justly referred to as the symbol of victory and triumph over the devil and over the works of the devil:

"Lord, You have given us Your Cross as the weapon against the devil; for he shudders and shakes, unable to behold its power, because it raises the dead and has also abolished death; for this, we venerate Your Burial and Resurrection." (Verses from the Sunday Laudatory Hymns, Tone A).

The Precious Cross is the "sign" of salvation of God's children - the "***sign of the Son of man***" (Matth.24:30).

This is the reason that John's Book of Revelation mentions that during the end times, salvation will be secured for those who will bear the sign of the Cross:

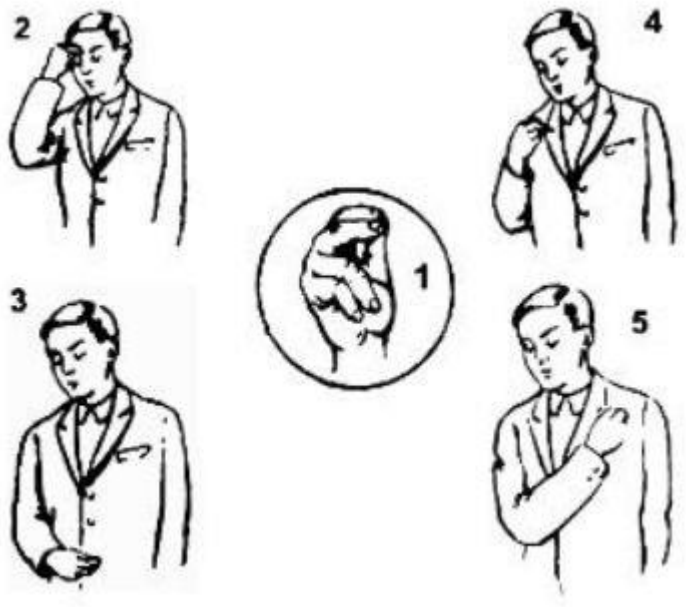
"***Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads***." (Rev.9:3-4. Cmp.also 7:2-4; Ezek.9:4-6).

Following all the above, every Orthodox faithful justifiably prays: "By the power of Your Cross, o Christ, fasten my mind in praising and glorifying Your salvific Resurrection."

The sign of the Cross is not a latter-day custom by Christians. It can be found in the Apostolic Tradition. It is testified by Justin Martyr the saint (150 A.D.) and by Tertullian (200 A.D.). The latter in fact says characteristically: "We Christians, in all our travels and moves, in every departure and return, when we put on our garments and shoes, when we bathe and when we sit at the table, when we light our lamp, when we are seated or laying down, in all of our actions in our daily lives in general, we make the sign of the Cross". This custom, he continues, "has its beginnings in the Tradition of the Church; it was toned up through customary practice, and should be preserved faithfully."

4. How we sign ourselves with the sign of the Cross

With the sign of the Cross, the entire theology of the Church and the entire essence of the Orthodox faith is depicted. The Orthodox Christian joins 3 fingers together (image 1 below), he then touches them against his forehead first (image 2), then against his abdomen (image 3), and finally, he touches his shoulders horizontally, from right (image 4) to left (image 5).



With the three joined fingers on the forehead we reflect and confess our faith in the One, Triadic God. When we place them on our abdomen, we do so as a representation of the Son, Who was born of the Virgin Mary. When, finally, we touch our shoulders, we do so as a representation of the Holy Spirit, which is characterized as "***the arm of the Lord***" (John 12:38) and as "***power from on high***" (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).

With the remaining 2 fingers joined together (image 1) in preparing to make the sign of the Cross, we represent the incarnation of Christ and the inseparable union of His two natures, thanks to which human nature was cured and raised to the heights of Theosis (deification).

5. The armor of the Cross

But the sign of the Cross is also the testimony of the new life on the part of the person who has been reborn, "in Christ".

With the sign of the Cross, we "seal" the main members of the body with a protective wall and thus dedicate them to God, in order to render them instruments for Christ and the Holy Trinity. We seal our mind, our heart, and all our strength and we express that dedication of our selves even more intensely together with the phrase: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

With the sign of the Cross, finally, we become participants in the passions and the Resurrection of Christ; we mortify the old self and everything that has to do with the works of the devil, and we are raised up together with Christ into a new life. "The Cross of the Lord signifies the abolishment of sin", as Saint Gregory Palamas says characteristically. "This is why one of the God-bearing fathers, when asked by an unfaithful person if he believes in the Crucified One, the saint replied 'Yes - the One Who crucified sin'..."

From all the above, we can understand why the Cross is a true suit of armor for a Christian - Christ's suit of armor - a formidable weapon, which the demons are terrified of.

This is why we Orthodox Christians make the sign of the Cross in every circumstance: when we pray, when we go to sleep, when we wake up, when we begin a project, and when we complete it. When we depart for a journey, when we pass outside a sacred Temple... generally, in all our life.

The Precious Cross is not - as we said - a magical medium at the disposal of man. An inner participation is imperative also. First of all, we must sign our body with the sign of the Cross visibly, not negligently, and in accordance with the order of our Church: With the three fingers joined together so that it will be as though the Cross itself were touching us.

This sacred sign must furthermore be accompanied by absolute faith in the Holy Trinity and the fact of Christ's Incarnation, as well as in His crucifixional death and His life-giving Resurrection. In other words, faith in all of the salvific dogmas of our Church, which we proclaim with the sign of the Cross.

An what is more, it must be accompanied by the absolute hope in God's inexpressible love and mercy, but also by our irrevocable decision to crucify and abolish our own sinful self, and to accept God's grace in order to hereafter consciously live a renovated life and an inner metamorphosis.

Chapter 25 - The Metamorphosis of the World

1. The world of passions and sin

The Holy Bible often speaks of the world and mentions the state it was turned into - after the Fall of man - and the catastrophe of the world's harmony.

"...***the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one...***" - that is, the entire world is under the power of the wicked one (1 John 5:19; cmp. John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). Even in the personal life of each faithful, the antithesis between the world of the "flesh" and the world of the "spirit" can be seen. (Rom. 8,1-13).

"***But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*** " (Rom.7:23-25).

These do not signify that the human body and matter in general can be characterized as evil. We know that man was created "***in the image of God***" (Gen.1:27). This doesn't refer to the body only, but to the whole man, as a psycho-somatic unity. "Man is not only the soul, nor only the body, but both together, which we say were created according to the image of God", as saint Gregory Palamas says.

However, after the Fall, man is no longer in his natural state. His body is under the influence of passions. This is what the Holy Bible refers to as "***flesh***", and "***the old man***" (Eph.4:22; Coloss.3:9; Rom.6:6), which opposes the spirit - that is, the "in Christ" redeemed man. (cmp.Gal.5:16-19)

Thus, the Church cannot disregard the body. What She does fight against are the passions of the body. "We were not taught to be body-exterminators, but passion-exterminators", we read in the quotes of the desert ascetics. That is, Christians do not have as their concern the extermination of their body, but how they should exterminate the desires of the flesh - the "***works of the flesh***" (Gal.5:16-19); "***false humility and***

neglect of the body, but of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." (Coloss.2:23; cmp also 1 John 2:14-17).

"***Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,***" (Coloss.3:5-6. Cmp also 5:19-21). "***And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.***" (Gal.5:24).

2. The metamorphosis of the body

In the Church the value of the human body is incalculable. This is testified by the event of Christ's incarnation, which comprises the basis for the overall salvation of man and the entire world. The Apostle Paul says very characteristically: "***For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;***" (Coloss.2:9; Cmp.Philip.2:5-11; Hebr.2:13-18; Isaiah 8:18, 41:8-9 e.a.).

This was the miraculous event that the Disciples had experienced atop the mount of the Transfiguration. That same Body of the Lord had not disintegrated in the tomb, but had been resurrected, so that the Apostles could actually touch those very wounds themselves (Psalms 15:9-10; Luke 24:39; John 2:21, 20:27; Acts 2:31-32; Revel.5:6).

Within Christ's new creation, man's body becomes a member of Christ's Body and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.6:15, 19). Consequently, man is called upon to glorify God "***with his body***" (1 Cor.6:20); to use his body "***with sanctity and honour***" (1 Thess.4:4); to offer it as "***a living sacrifice and holy, pleasing to God***" (Rom.12:1), so that "***Jesus' life may be revealed in our body***" (2 Cor.4:10). The man of the new creation is indeed "***one of His offspring***" (Acts 17:28), a partaker of His glory - which he also reflects, with his body (2 Cor.3:18).

The Church's struggle therefore is not against the body, but against the body's passions. When the new creation's man is freed of his corruptive passions, then his senses and his entire body become pure and bright, and everything around him radiates God's love and glory.

In the lives of our Church's Saints there are numerous examples of this liberation from the passions of the body:

Saint John of the Ladder narrates an example of a certain holy ascetic, who had been asked to baptize a young woman and who, beholding the presence of female beauty had been "moved to the love of God and the shedding of ample tears" and "from that, greatly magnified the Creator God".

It was truly wondrous and astonishing - notes Saint John - for one to see how that same beauty in a man governed by passions can lead to his downfall, whereas in another (that is, a continent and virtuous one), it becomes the cause for wreaths and glory. That man, concludes Saint John, even prior to his death, is already living the resurrection and incorruptibility.

3. Honouring Holy relics

"We also venerate sacred relics" says Saint Gregory Palamas, "because they were not deprived of sanctifying power, just as godhood had not left the Magisterial Body of the Lord during His 3-day death."

This sanctifying power is the result of the relationship of the Saints with Christ; a relationship which does not pertain simply to the spiritual sector but also to our body, so that Saints are rendered "***wholly***" Saints, in having preserved blameless (by the Grace of God) "***their whole spirit and soul and body, for the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ***" (1 Thess.5:23), Who will "***transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself***."(Philipp.3:21).

The body therefore that we shall receive during the Coming of the Lord is His resurrected, transformed and deified body. A foretaste and a depiction of this event are the sacred relics of the Saints of our Church. Their sanctifying power is the result of the association with the Body of the Lord, which the Saints had donned during Holy Baptism (Gal.3:27) and had preserved blameless up to the time of their mortal end (1 Thess,5:23); they are in other words the fruit of the uncreated divine energies.

The theological interpretation regarding the honouring of holy relics is analyzed by Saint Simeon the New Theologian, as follows:

"*It follows that the soul which has been made worthy of partaking of divine grace because it was sanctified, must necessarily sanctify its whole body, because it is the soul that keeps the whole body together, inasmuch as it is found in all of its members. For this, just as the grace of the Holy Spirit appropriates the soul, thus also the Holy Spirit appropriates its body. However, while the soul is still with the body, the All-Holy Spirit does not transfer His full glory to the whole body, because it is necessary for the soul to show its intentions right to the very end of this lifetime - that is, it must show that it follows as it should the grace of the Holy Spirit. However, when the end comes and the soul is separated from the body - that is, after the struggle is finally over and the soul has won and has departed with the victory wreath - that is when the grace of the Holy Spirit appropriates and fully sanctifies the entire body of the said soul, and that is why the naked bones of the Saints exude healings and cure every sickness. Because when the soul is separated from the body during death, that is when the soul - alone and bodiless - finds itself together with complete divinity - that is, with divine grace - and becomes God by grace. As for the (dead) body, it remains on its own, without the soul - together only with divinity - and reveals the Divine energy and miracles to people. Because then, it is neither possible for the soul to have any obstacle to its energies on account of a bond with the body (having been separated from it), nor is the body any longer burdened (on account of the soul) by physical needs such as hunger, thirst and other such things. But, because they both - the soul and the body - have been released from every kind of need and temptation which they had on account of that bond between them, that is why Divine grace takes effect both in the one and the other, unimpeded, as though they have now become entirely God's - both the soul and the body - and have been appropriated by divinity through the God-pleasing polity that they pursued in this world while they were bonded together. It is at the time of the common resurrection that the body will also receive the incorruptibility, which God had bestowed to the soul that was sanctified*."

4. The precious relics in the first Christian record of martyrdoms

The honoring of Holy relics is not a later custom by Christians. It goes back to the first Christian years and remains a continuous tradition of our Church.

In the first record of martyrdoms by Saint Polycarp († 156), a characteristic reference:

When the devil saw the martyr being rewarded with the wreath of incorruptibility, he "strived, so that we would not be able to retrieve his body, even though there were many who desired to do it, and to touch his holy body. So he (the devil) prompted Nikites - Herod's father and Alke's brother - to meet with the ruler so that the martyr's body not be delivered to them (in case they leave him crucified and people begin to worship him). He said these things with the prompting and the backing of the Judeans - who were supervising us in case we removed him (the martyr) from the fire. They did not know that it was not possible for us to abandon Christ, Who had suffered for the salvation of all the world - the immaculate One for the sake of sinners - nor ever worship anyone else, for we worship Him because He is the Son of God; however, as for the martyrs, we love them as befits disciples and emulators of the Lord, because of their incomparable love towards their King and Master... When the Centurion saw the Judeans' quarrel, he placed the martyr between them and cremated him as was the custom. Then, after collecting the martyr's bones - which were even more precious than precious stones and gold - we deposited them in a suitable place. The Lord will help us to assemble there whenever we can, with joy and jubilation, in order to celebrate the memory of his martyrdom (his birth-day), and for the commemoration of those who had struggled before us, and for the testing and preparation of those who in the future are going to struggle."

This text is clear and needs no analysis. It further testifies that our Church's tradition of performing the divine Liturgy on the Holy Altar in which sacred relics have been deposited, is a proto-Christian tradition.

We have a similar testimony regarding the honouring of Holy relics, thanks to the second, extant record of martyrdoms of the year 177, which is the epistle by the communities of Vienna and Lyon addressed to the communities of Asia and Phrygia, in which are mentioned the martyrdoms that took place during the persecutions against the Christians of Lyon.

5. The fragrance of the Holy Spirit

We all know that an ineffable fragrance emanates from the sacred relics of some Saints. In the sacred Book of Saints we read about the holy great-martyr and miracle-working Demetrius the Myrrh-streamer: "So much myrrh streamed from his body, that, despite being distributed to the local pilgrims and to others who had come from afar, not only did it not diminish, but instead it flowed even more, thanks to the intercessions of the Saint. This myrrh however, also had the power to cause serious healings."

The same is mentioned for many other Saints, as, for example, Saint Nektarios of Aegina Island, Saint Savvas of the Serbs, and Saint Seraphim of Sarov.

What is this ineffable fragrance attributed to?

It is the "***fragrance of Christ***" (2 Cor.2:15), the presence of the Grace of the Holy Spirit, which enveloped the Saints during their terrestrial lives and which poured over their bodies. It is, as we mentioned during the holy mystery of Chrismation "the Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit", the baptism of fire, which persists

in the Saints of our Church and makes them sense an inexpressible warmth and an ineffable fragrance, which is the fruit if the Spirit. This is why in the Orthodox Church the sacred myrrh is prepared with aromatic elements.

Truly amazing is the event that Motovilov had experienced during his conversation with Saint Seraphim of Sarov in the forest:

«-What else can you sense, Filotheos? asked the Elder Seraphim.
-An unusual warmth.
-But Batushka, we are sitting in the forest and it is winter. Below our feet is snow and on us is a layer of snow more than one vershok (4,4 cm.) thick, and snowflakes are falling too... what kind of warmth can exist here?
I replied:
-The kind that exists when you bathe...
-And the fragrance? he asked. Is that like when we bathe?
-No, I replied. There is nothing in the world that resembles this fragrance. When my mother was alive, I loved dancing and would go to dances... I remember my mother used to sprinkle me with perfumes that she purchased from the best stores in Kazan. However, not even those perfumes gave out such a fragrance...
And the Batushka father Seraphim with a smile said to me:
-I too am aware of that. It is exactly as you say, but I intentionally asked you, if that is how you also felt about it. It's the pure truth, Filotheos! No earthly fragrant delight can compare to the fragrance that we are perceiving right now. Because right now we are enveloped by the fragrance of the Holy Spirit of God. What on earth can compare to it?... »

6. The miracles wrought by Holy relics

From all the above, the theological interpretation of the miraculous power of precious relics also becomes evident.

Examples of the miraculous powers of God's uncreated energies as manifested in sacred relics can be found initially in the Holy Bible. Just how much the sacred relics of Holy men were venerated in the Old Testament can be witnessed in the case of Joseph, whose bones we are told were "***watched over***" (Wisd.Sirach 49:15) - that is, they were safeguarded with care. We need to underline here the following amazing detail: whereas all contact with the body of a deceased person is characterized in the Old Testament as a "***defilement***" (Levit.21:1-9; Ezek.44:25), the Israelites transferred the bones of Joseph with great reverence, without this rendering the congregation of the people unclean (Gen.50:25; Exod.13:19).

Also, characteristic is the case of a "man of God" who had strayed, not having kept God's commandment and for that, he was punished. So, when he departed from Baithel on his donkey, he encountered a lion on his path and was killed by it. "***His body***" says the Old Testament "***was thrown in the road, and the donkey stood beside it, and the lion stood beside the body***." (3 Kings 13:24). Even that wild beast, which had become the instrument of divine justice, did not devour the dead body of the man of God, but in fact became reconciled with the donkey and the two of them together stood by the body, guarding the holy relic. Afterwards, it says that " ***And behold, men were passing by and saw the carcass thrown in the road, and the lion was standing by the carcass, and they came in and spoke in the town wherein the old prophet lived. And the one who had brought him back from the way heard and said, "This is the man of***

God who embittered the word of the Lord." And he went and found his body thrown in the road, and the donkey and the lion stood beside the body, and the lion did not eat the body of the man of God and did not crush the donkey. And the prophet took up the body of the man of God and laid it on the donkey, and the prophet brought it back to the city to bury him in his own grave, and they mourned over him, "Woe, brother!" And it happened, after he mourned him, that he said to his sons, saying, "When I die, bury me in this grave wherein the man of God is buried; lay me beside his bones, that my bones may be saved, along with his bones." (3 Kings 13:25-31).

This passage clearly testifies the conviction of that Prophet regarding the miraculous state of the sacred relics of a holy man, even if he had momentarily disobeyed God's commandment and was punished. A further testimony regarding the miraculous state of holy relics is the stance of the donkey, as well as the lion - who had become an instrument of God and had remained standing near them with honour and reverence.

But the miraculous power of the divine energies that act through the relics of holy people is also evident in the case of the Prophet Elisha. The Old Testament mentions that a certain dead person had been thrown upon the Prophet's grave. As soon as the dead body touched the bones of Elisha, he was revived: "***And Elisaie died, and they buried him. And lightly armed men of Moab came in the land when the year came. And it happened, when they were burying the man, that behold, they saw the lightly armed man, and they threw the man in the grave of Elisaie, and he went and touched the bones of Elisaie, and he revived and stood up on his feet."*** (4 Kings 13:21. Cmp. also, Wisd.Sirach 48:14).

From within the holy book of Saints of our Church we know of many miracles that occur through holy relics. In the Bios of Saint Nektarios, among other miracles is also the following:

"On the day of the blessed repose of the Saint, the husband of a certain pious woman - who lacked any faith and piety - happened by good fortune to kiss the right hand of the Saint during the translation of the precious relic to Aegina Island. Paradoxically, he felt the Saint's hand to be warm and supple, and, in wonder of this phenomenon, he underwent a change and, by the grace of the Saint, became truly faithful and pious."

7. The miraculous power of material objects in the life of Saints

From the Holy Bible we know that the Lord's miraculous power was manifest even in His garment (Matth.9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:44-48). For example, when He arrived in Gennesaret : "***And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched it were made perfectly well."***(Matth.14:35-36; Mark 6:56; Matth.9:20-22).

In the Acts of the Apostles, it mentions that: "***...God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them."*** (Acts 19:11-12).

As for Peter, it says that even his shadow possessed the healing power of Christ: ***"so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to***

Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed." (Acts 5:15-16).

We can thus better understand all those amazing events that we encounter in the lives of the Saints.

On the day of the repose of Saint Nektarios, for example, the following miracle took place:

A little while after the Saint's passing, and while the sacred tabernacle of his body was still in Hospital, the mere contact with his garment which happened to be thrown onto an adjoining bed was enough to restore the health of another patient who was a paralytic.

8. "The image of Your ineffable glory am I"!

All that has been said above can interpret why, during the funeral service of a Christian, we light candles before the deceased bodies of our brethren, as we do before holy icons. The body of a Christian person is characterized as "the image of the ineffable glory of God", albeit bearing "the stigmata of our trespasses", as the relative hymn of our Church mentions.

9. The metamorphosis of Creation

Everything that was mentioned about the Saints of our Church, about the Holy icons and the veneration of sacred relics, do not comprise the final glory of the world. They are only the "betrothal" signs of the final metamorphosis of mankind and the entirety of Creation at the end of Time.

All of Creation "***...was subjected to futility..."*** and ***"the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now"*** *(*Rom.8:20, 22); however it too ***"...will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (***Rom.8:21) [*]

This is the reason that we can see all of Creation co-celebrating the event of liberation, in the Person of Christ:
«Angels, together with shepherds offer glorification; Magi travel together with a Star...».

Everyone comes to Him and offers their own gifts:
«The Angels, their hymn; the skies, the Star; the Magi, their gifts; and we, a Virgin Mother».

And on the night of the Resurrection:
«Now, everything is filled with light; both the heavens and earth and the underworld;
All of Creation therefore celebrates the resurrection of Christ, in which it is secured».

The hymns of our Church move within the Spirit of the Holy Bible, which pre-announces this overall joy of Creation for the event of salvation.

The Prophet Isaiah says about God's people : " ***see, those who are subject to Me shall be glad with joy, [...] But to those who are subject to him, a new name shall be called, which shall be blessed on the earth; for they shall bless the true God, and those who swear on the earth shall swear by the true God, for they shall forget their first affliction, and it shall not come up into their heart. For heaven will be new, and the earth will be new, and they shall not remember the former things, nor shall they come upon their***

heart..." (Isaiah 65:14-17) and "***For as the new heaven and the new earth, which I am making, remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your offspring and your name stand.***" (Isaiah 66:22; Cmp. 2 Pet.3:13; Revel.21:1).

"***... for the mountains and the hills shall leap forth as they welcome you with happiness, and all the trees of the field shall clap with their branches.***" (Isaiah 55:12).

All of Creation therefore will participate in the joy of "the liberation of the children of God", because it also participates in that liberation. (Rom.8:21).

The Orthodox Church gets a foretaste of that total liberation from its yoke of slavery and expresses it in a unique manner in Her liturgical space - with the architecture of the Temples, the Holy Altar, the Bishop's throne, the sacred pulpit, and all the objects used during worship; for example, the sacred vessels, the candles, the incense, the oil, the "antidoron" bread, the holy water, etc.. Each and every one of these is a part of God's creation - they are God's gifts, which man receives and offers back to God, just like the bread and the wine of the Divine Eucharist. Just as the bread and the wine are turned into Body and Blood of Christ, likewise the wood, the paintings turn into holy icons, the walls become Temples of the living God, the candles and the incense turn into prayers. Everything is assumed into the body of Christ, in the Church, and they all belong to the transformed world of Grace. (cmp.1 Chron.29:10-16). It is their reference to Christ and His God-human Body that makes even material things partakers of the grace of Christ and renders them a source of gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this way, matter is enveloped by the spirit, it is sanctified and thus making it palpable to us and allowing us to venerate it as something sacred.

On this topic there is the touching story of the Holy New-martyr Ahmed, who was blessed by perceiving the fragrance of the Uncreated grace of God, through the "antidoron" bread morsel of his young servant girl used to eat. The young girl lived together with the Muslim Ahmed, according to the Mohammedan custom, and the "antidoron" morsel used to be brought to her by an elderly Christian woman. This is how the incident is described in the book of Saints:

«Whenever this happened» - that is, whenever the young servant girl consumed the antidoron - «and Ahmed happened to be near her, he could sense a beautiful fragrance coming from her mouth. He therefore asked her what she ate sometimes so that her mouth smelled so fragrantly. She, not knowing what was happening, would say that she had not eaten anything. But he insisted on asking her in order to find out. So, she told him that she ate nothing else, except for the morsels of bread that had been blessed by the Priests, which were then brought to her by that elderly lady, whenever she returned from the Christians' Church. Ahmed then felt the desire to see the manner by which the Christians received the bread, as well as the order of their Church. So, dressing himself in the manner that Christians dressed, he went to the Great Church that was in the Patriarchate, where he stayed on to observe the Divine Liturgy. The Lord of All, Who knows the secrets of people's hearts, added a second miracle to the first, and thus led him to the awareness of the Truth. So, while he was inside the Church, he noticed that during the ritual procession towards the Royal Door, the priest walked without touching the ground and was bathed in light; he also noticed that when the Patriarch was blessing the congregation with his hand, shafts of light emanated from his fingertips, which illuminated the heads of the Christians. But, even though the rays of light fell on the heads of all the Christians, they did not illuminate his head. Having done this twice, three times, he still noticed the same thing happening. The blessed Ahmed, having been convinced to believe, unhesitatingly called upon the Priest, who ensured his rebirth though Holy Baptism, and thereafter he remained for a long time secretly Christian. When, during a meeting the potentates

were discussing what the most significant thing in the world was, they asked him also. Ahmed replied in as loud a voice as he could, that the most significant thing of all was the faith of the Christians. Having confessed immediately afterwards that he himself was a Christian, he checked with outspokenness the falsehood in the Mohammedans' deluded beliefs, which caused him to receive the wreath of martyrdom after being beheaded upon the command of the ruler, on the 3rd of May, in the year 1682».

(*) OODE note:

The English NKJV text of Rom.8:20-21 says: " ***[20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; [21] because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."***
It should be noted that the original Greek text does not say "because of Him" (the capital H denoting the Lord); Creation was NOT subjected to futility because of the Lord, but because of man. Creation unwillingly resigned itself to futility, along with the one who had imposed it (man), in the hope that it too would be liberated from the bondage of corruption, in order to partake of the freedom of the glory that God's children would be receiving in due course...
20 τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἑκοῦσα, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐπ᾽ ἐλπίδι 21 ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ Θεοῦ.

10. "...so that also through elements may Your Name be glorified!..."

It has become evident with all that has been said, that in the Orthodox manner of divine worship, especially underlined are the element of love and the element of personal relationship that God enters upon, with His entire Creation. Through divine worship, the Orthodox Church also proclaims faith in the One, Triune God - that is, the God of love - and the love of Christ's divine humanity - in the par excellence expression of the Triune God's love towards mankind and the world.

God is love. A love that is poured out - as we have seen- through the uncreated divine energies, to the world also. With His creation of the world, God enters upon a personal relationship with that world, while the Lord - with His incarnation - enters that created world. It is therefore understood that we too must embrace with respect and love everything that God has fashioned and everything that His Grace has transformed. That way, we do not idolize the works of God, but rather express our honour, reverence and worship to the Creator God Himself. Everything we do must be "***for the glory of God***" (1 Cor.10:31) and God must be glorified "***in everything, through Jesus Christ***" (1 Pet.4:11). This Orthodox truth is expressed perfectly by a prayer of the sacred Service for the Great Blessing of the Sanctification of the Water: «... so that by the elements, and by the angels, and by the people and by visible things and invisible things, may Your All-holy Name be blesses, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of the ages, Amen».

If we were to look at the world as being outside any pertinence with Christ - that is, in a state of corruption and death - then it would not have been permissible to bestow any honour towards the things of the world. An honour such as that would be purely idolatry. But, when we perceive the world in its association with the Body of Christ, the Church - that is, when we consider the transformed world,

liberated from the bondage of the devil, then it is our duty to honour those things of the "in-Christ" transformed world. The reason is that Christ's world is a source of blessings (1 Cor.10:4; Wisd.Sirach 38:5), and what is more, that honouring and veneration is conveyed to Christ Himself, Who is the source of salvation as well as sanctification (1 Cor.10:4;; Wisd.Sol.16:7).

Orthodox divine worship does not address a God Who is impersonal and foreign to man and the world. It is addressed to the One and only Triune God; the God of love, Who, through His Son, enters the world and transforms the world. That is why we worship God, not apart from the world, nor "the world per se" (as certain heretics assert), but from within the world, which is assumed and transformed wihtin the Body of Christ - the Church. Besides, this is clearly taught by the Holy Bible, which underlines the presence of God's glory within the world.

As mentioned earlier on, many are the instances where the uncreated glory of the Triune God has been made manifest in the world: there is the case of the Flaming Bush (Exod.3:2 etc), the luminous cloud that led the Israelites (Exod.13:11), the flashes atop the mountain (Exod.24:17) and the illumination of Moses' countenance (Exod.34:29-30) as well as other instances. "...***Do I not fill the sky and the earth? says the Lord.***" (Jerem.23:24. cmp.Psalms 138:7-8). "***For Your incorruptible spirit is in all things***" (Wisd.Solom.12:1), "***Because the spirit of the Lord fills the world***" (Wisd.Solom.1:7; cmp.Acts 2:2).

All of these verses reveal to us that God's creation - all of His creation - is the carrier of God's glory. "***But I live, and My name is living; and the glory of the Lord shall fill all the earth***" - as God had said to Moses (Num.14:21). "***...'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth; the whole earth is full of his glory!'*** " chant the Seraphim, before the Throne of the Triune God (cmp. also Psalms 71:19, 18:1-7). That same, uncreated divine glory also made its appearance on Mount Tabor (Matth.17:2) and in the lives of the Saints of our Church (Acts 7:55, 9:3, 22:6-11). The presence of God's glory within the world does not make any allowance for the worship of God "per se" - that is, separately from creation, which is "***filled with His glory***" (Isaiah 6:3). This is why the Orthodox Church worships God in each and every thing, which the Holy Spirit "abides in" and "completes", and through Whom His sanctifying grace (which is the grace of God) is poured forth and acts upon the world: Upon the Virgin Mary and the Saints; upon the Holy Bible, upon the Holy Cross, upon holy relics, holy icons, and upon all the liturgical objects, as well as the sanctified (holy) water, the oil of the Unction, the sacred oil-lamps, and upon all of the transformed creation of God.

This is the "ortho-dox" (upright belief) - that is, the proper manner of worship of the Triune God, and the reason our Church is called "Orthodox Church".

11. The sanctification (blessing) of the waters

In the Old Testament there is a beautiful incident that portrays the uncreated Divine Energies acting upon the waters of the River Jordan so that they healed Naiman, a general of Syria:

"And as for Syria, they went out lightly armed and took captive from the land of Israel a little girl, and she was in the presence of the wife of Naiman. And she said to her mistress, "Would that my lord (note: her husband) ***were in the presence of the prophet of God who is in Samaria! Then He will recover him from his leprosy."*** (3 Kings 5:2-3)

Equipped with letters of reference by the king of Syria, Naiman went to the king of the Israelite people and from there he went on to meet the Prophet Elisha. However, the Prophet sent a messenger telling him to go to the Jordan river and wash himself in order for him to be healed of the leprosy:

"***And Elisaie sent a messenger to him, saying, "Going, wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall return to you, and you shall be cleansed." And Naiman became angry and went away and said, "Behold now, I kept saying that he will come out to me and stand and call out in the name of his god and lay his hand on the place and recover the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharphar, rivers of Damascus, better than the Jordan and all the waters of Israel? Going, shall I not wash in them and be cleansed?" And he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants approached and said to him, "The prophet spoke a great word to you; shall you not do it? — even because he said to you, 'Wash, and be cleansed.' " And Naiman went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of Elisaie, and his flesh returned like the flesh of a small child, and he was cleansed. And he returned to Elisaie, he and all his camp, and he came and stood and said, "Behold, indeed I know that there is no god in all the earth but only in Israel, and now accept the blessing from your slave." And Elisaie said, "The Lord lives, before whom I stand, if I will accept it!" And he urged him to accept, but he refused.***" (3 Kings 5:10-16)

As Naiman himself quite rightly noted, it was not a case of the waters of the Jordan possessing magical qualities; it was the healing power of God's uncreated divine energies whose presence had distinguished the waters of the Jordan from the waters of the rivers of Damascus. It was exactly the presence of those divine energies that rendered the water therapeutic and also the reason that Naiman acknowledged the God of Israel as the only true God. (cmp.also Luke 4:27). This was the same healing power that the waters of the Pool of Bethesda presented, during the moments it was being stirred up by an angel of God: "***For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had***." (John 5:4; cmp also 9:7).

However, according to the hymn of our Church on the Theophany, "the nature of the waters" was sanctified, with the Lord's Baptism in the River Jordan: "*Today the nature of the waters is sanctified, The Jordan bursts forth and turns back the flood of its streams, on seeing the Master being immersed*." "*Jordan River, fill yourself with delight; earth and sea, hills and mountains and mankind's hearts, leap for joy now, having admitted light within you…*" In the River Jordan, it wasn't just the waters that had received Christ; something far more important had taken place: Christ had received its waters in His embrace, as well as all the other elements of nature and had sanctified them - just as He had received all of Creation in His open embrace upon the Cross, and had liberated it from the bonds of the devil.

Thus, the blessed water that is sanctified by Christ's Body - which is the Church - is not the ordinary water of the fallen world. Taste-wise, it is of course no different to that water; however, the fact that it was embraced by the Church and became a "***spiritual drink***" that springs from the "***spiritual rock***" which is Christ (1 Cor.10:4), renders it a source of blessings and grace. (Exod.15:25)

For this reason, a beautiful blessing of our Church says: "*Lord, You, Who had condescended to be baptized in the Jordan and in that way sanctified the waters, lend Your ear and hear us. And bless us all who, with bowed heads, indicate the form of a servant. Make us worthy to be filled with Your sanctifying grace by drinking a little of this water and sprinkling ourselves with it. May it be for the health of our soul and our body, for You are the One Who sanctifies our souls and our bodies, and it is for this reason that we extend our glorification, our*

gratitude and our veneration to You, and Your Beginning-less Father and Your Most Holy and Benevolent and Life-giving Spirit, now, and forever, and unto the ages of the ages. Amen."

Chapter 26 - Our True Homeland

1. Resident aliens and sojourners

After the Fall, man has been living far away from the paternal home, in a foreign land. The Holy Bible mentions him as a "resident alien" and a "sojourner" (Gen.23:4; Levit.25:23; 1 Chron.29:15; Psal.38:13 and 1 Pet.1:1) - the reason being that man's true homeland is the love of the Triune God. That is what mankind fell away from, through Adam, and that is where he will return to, through Christ, in order to once again live the fullness of it, in the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Through Holy Baptism we become members of the "***Church of the first-born, who are inscribed in heaven***" (Hebr.12:23) and "***fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God"*** because we are built "...***on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in Whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord***." (Ephes.2:19-21)

With this, we can comprehend why the Apostle Paul underlines that "***our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is also able to subdue all things to Himself."*** (Philip.3:20-21)... "***For we have no permanent city here, but we seek the one to come***" (Hebr.13:14). Whereas the future residence is perceived as a permanent one, the present life is characterized as a "testing place" - that is, as a place of trials. Asks the Book of Job, "***"Is not the life of a human being on earth a trial, and is not his life like that of a day laborer?*** (Job 7:1. cmp. Philip.1:21-24, 2 Cor.5:8-9, 2 Tim.4:6. Eccles.12:7).

The first Christians experienced that reality very intensely, with all its consequences. An ancient text - the epistle to Diognetus - distinguishes the Christians from the remaining people as follows:

"Christians do not differ from the other people, neither with regard to the place that they inhabit, nor to the language that they speak, or the customs that they have, for they do not inhabit particular cities or speak their own dialect or live a separate life... While they inhabit both Hellenic and barbaric cities - wherever each has found himself in - and while they observe the local customs as regards the dress and food and the remaining ways of life, they live a wondrous and truly paradoxical life. They inhabit their homeland, but only as temporary citizens (sojourners). As citizens they might participate in everything, however, they tolerate everything as though they are aliens. Every foreign land is to them a homeland, and every homeland is foreign... They (too) wear flesh, but they do not live by the flesh. They might pass through life on earth, but they are citizens of heaven..."

Saint John the Chrysostom, when addressing the Christians of his time, had said:

«Are you not aware that this life is a migration? Do you imagine that you are a permanent resident of a city? You are a traveller. Do you understand what I said? You are not a permanent resident, but a traveller and

wayfarer. Do not tell me that 'I belong to this or that city'; no-one has a city 'here'. The city is up above. The present life is a passage. Let us therefore walk it every day, as much as our nature allows. Have you ever met anyone who hides away his money when he is on the move? Is there any person who hides away his gold while on the road? Tell me: when you enter an inn, do you sit and decorate the inn? Not at all - you eat, drink, and are in a hurry to move on. This life is an inn. We entered it, and we will pass our entire life in it. So let us strive to depart from it with high hopes. Let us not leave anything 'here', for fear of losing it 'there'. When you enter an inn, what do you say to the servant? 'Take care where you will place my luggage! Do not leave anything behind here, in case even the smallest, the most insignificant item is lost!' Well, that is what we should do in this life too. Let us regard this lifetime as an inn, and let us not leave anything behind in the inn. Let us carry everything into our permanent homeland. You are a traveller and wayfarer, and in fact, something less than a traveller. How is that? Well, let me tell you: A wayfarer knows when he arrives and when he departs from the inn, because he determines the time of his arrival and his departure. We, however, enter the inn - that is, the present life - without knowing when we are going to depart from it. In fact, we sometimes prepare sustenance for a very long period - even to the moment that the Master calls us to Him... Our departure is undetermined. Wealth is not a stable thing. The dangers are very many and waves batter us from all sides. And you have devoted yourself frantically to deceptive things - to shadows. Why do you leave reality and chase after shadows? We are therefore "resident aliens" and "sojourners" and none of us knows the day and the hour of departure from this life."

"Lord, why do some people die at a young age, while others reach a ripe old age?" asked Abba Anthony, *"and why do some live in poverty and others in wealth? And how do the unjust become wealthy, while just people are poverty-stricken?"*

A voice then came to him, saying: *"Anthony, mind yourself! These are God's measures of justice, and it does not benefit you to learn them!"*

2. Victory over death

When we speak of death we usually say that it is a natural thing. However we need to underline that death is not the result of man's nature the way God had fashioned it. In the Holy Bible it says that "***God did not make death nor does he delight in the destruction of the living. For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them"*** (Wisd.Solom.1:13). "***Because God created human beings for incorruption and made them the image of his own nature, but through the envy of the devil death entered the world...***" (Wisd.Solom.2:23-24). God fashioned man as an immortal being, and according to His image. But because of the devil's envy, death entered the world.

Death, therefore, is the result of the new situation that came into being after the Fall; in other words, it is the consequence of sin. In this way, death became mankind's enemy (1 Cor.15:26) as well as all Creation, which sighs and groans together with mankind, to this day (Rom.8:21). It is then natural for man to hope for his return to the former state and anticipate to be freed from death.

As far back as the Old Testament era - even from the very first day on which man sinned and thus entered death's domain where the devil rules (Hebr.2:14) - God promised to rid man of the devil, therefore subsequently of death. (Gen.3:15)

The Prophets of the Old Testament proclaim with unadulterated enthusiasm the triumphant victory over death:

"Death, having prevailed, swallowed them up, and God has again taken away every tear from every face; the disgrace of the people he has taken away from all the earth, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."(Isaiah 25:8)

"I shall rescue them from the hand of Hades and shall redeem them from Death. O Death, where is your sentence? O Hades, where is your goad?" (Hosee13:14).

The Apostle Paul uses the same victory cry of the Prophet, in order to proclaim the overthrow of death: ***"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is devoured by victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" [...] But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (1 Cor.15:54-57).

"Where, o death, is your sting? Where, o Hades, is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are thrown down", our Church repeats on the night of Pascha. By whom was death devoured? It was devoured by the victory that was accomplished in the Person of Christ. Christ had "***likewise shared in the same things***" - that is, He became a participant of those things; He "***partook of flesh and blood***" exactly like man, so that ***"He might destroy him who had the power of death - that is, the devil - and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."*** (Hebr.2:14-15) In other words, victory was accomplished "***in the flesh of Christ***" (Ephes.2:15) And this victory was not confined only to the living; instead, with Christ's descent into Hades, even our deceased brethren were included (1 Pet.3:19).

«*Hades reigns, but not eternally, over the race of mortals. Having being placed in a tomb, o Mighty One, with a life-giving palm did You rend the locks of death and proclaim an unfeigned redemption to those sleeping there since the ages, o Saviour, thus becoming the first-born of the dead*». (Troparion hymn from the Matins of Great Holy Saturday)

Christ's resurrection was not a resurrection of a spiritual nature; it was an overall, total resurrection. Christ was resurrected with His flesh and His bones, which is why one could see and touch His wounds (Luke 24:39-40; John 20:27; cmp.Revel.5:6). This was not a case of His "materialization", as asserted by deluded people, but an actual resurrection of Christ's Body. In other words, what the disciples had seen was not a "spirit" but the Lord Himself, Who reassured them that He was with "flesh and bones" and invited them to touch Him and to offer Him food, in order to be convinced of the fact of the resurrection of His Body (Luke 24:39-42) - a fact that was not only pre-announced by the Prophets of the Old Testament (Psal.15:9-10; cmp.Acts 2:31-32), but also by the Lord Himself, Who had said the following, regarding His Body: "***...'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and You will raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body..."*** (John 2:19-21).

That resurrected Body of the Lord - which had overcome death - is the body that each and every Christian puts on, the moment he is introduced -through Holy Baptism- into the Body of Christ, the Church (Gal.3:27; Ephes.1:22, 5,23. Col.1:18, 24) and enters the kingdom of life. It is therefore natural that he no longer fears death, because he has the Lord's reassurance that death does not approach that place (Matth.16:18).

3. The first resurrection

«***...Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*** *[...]* ***This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years***» (Revel.20:4-6).

This excerpt refers to all the prophets and the righteous of the Old Testament who had remained faithful to God and had not submitted themselves to the "beast" that would brand them with its "mark" on their faces and their hands : evidence of their infidelity to God and complete subservience to the works of Satan, among which is also idol worship (Psal.95:5). They were all those who had suffered "***for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God***", even though they had lived in the era of the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul mentions characteristically about Moses, that he had chosen «***rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward***» (Hebr.11:25-26. Cmp Psal.88:51-52).

Both Moses and all the holy men of the Old Testament whom the Apostle mentions by name (Hebr.11) - as well as the entire "cloud of martyrs" mentioned in Hebr.12:1, " ***did not receive the promise*** - ***God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us***." (Hebr.11:40) All of them had participated in the "first resurrection", which occurred with Christ's triumphant descent into Hades (1 Pet.3:19) and Christ's victory over the devil and the works of the devil. They are all now in communion with Christ and are reigning with Him "for one thousand years" - that is, up until the time of His glorious Second Coming - during which time the "second resurrection" will take place - that is, the Final Judgment.

The Saints of our Church are truly blessed, inasmuch as having participated in that first resurrection and are reigning together with Christ. The "second death" - that is, God's final condemnatory judgment during the Second Coming - will have no authority over those righteous ones.

However, we too partake of that glory of the children of the Kingdom, through our "in Christ" living which is realized through the mysteries of our Church. We too partake of that "first resurrection", through Holy Baptism (Rom.6:3-11); we too become participants of the communion of the Saints and children of the Kingdom of God.

The "one thousand years" do not refer to a future time: they commenced with Christ's victory over the devil, with His victory over death, and they will end with the Lord's Second Coming. In the Lord's very own words, "***'Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.'***" (Matth.16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27. Cmp. Matth.28:20). From the above, it becomes evident that the thousand-year-long reign mentioned in John's Revelations (20:4-6), had already begun, as far back as the time of the Apostles. That reign is Christ's Church, which was established on the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets, with Christ as the Chief Cornerstone (Eph.2:20). However, all other Christians - those who have received Baptism after the Pentecost, and ourselves in this day and age - "***are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,***

Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone", "***for through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father***" (Eph.2:18-20. Cmp.Gal.3:27-28; Eph.4:4-6, 5:30; John 10:16). We repeat, therefore, that the Lord's words stating that many of His audience "would not taste of death until they saw the kingdom of God" are not symbolic words. They must be taken literally: the Kingdom of God commenced from the moment of Christ's death and His triumphant descent into Hades. That is when the so-called "second coming" took place. We are already living in the days of "end times" (Matth.12:28; Luke 11:20, 17:21).

We must underline that there is a difference between the place of the Saints and ourselves. We received the "betrothal ring" of the Spirit, through our Baptism (2 Cor.1:22; Eph.1:14). Our participation in the "first resurrection" is not of a permanent character, as is the in-Christ communion of the Saints, who have been freed of sin and are participants of the Uncreated glory of God. We, unlike them, struggle to attain that permanent participation in the Uncreated divine glory.

All the aforementioned are proof of the pitiful delusion of those who misinterpret the passage of Revelations (20:4-6): ***"...some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures."*** (2 Pet.3:16).

4. The souls of the righteous in God's hand

«For the impious did not reason rightly and said among themselves: "Short and sorrowful is our life, and there is no remedy when a human being dies, and no one is known who has returned from Hades. Because we came into being by chance and hereafter we shall be, as though we had never existed, because the breath in our nostrils is smoke and reason is a spark within the beating of our hearts; when it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will be dispersed as thin air. *[...]* ***Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and let us make good use of the creation as in youth;*** *[...]* ***Let us see if his*** *[=the impious']* ***words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his*** *[the pious']* ***life; for if the righteous man is a divine son, He will help him and will rescue him from the hand of those who oppose him.*** *[...]* ***Thus they*** *[the impious]* ***reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them, and they did not know divine mysteries nor hoped for the wages of holiness nor recognized the reward for blameless souls. Because God created human beings for incorruption and made them the image of his own nature, but through the envy of the devil death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.***" (Wisd.Solom.2:1-25).

Thus, there were deluded people in the age of the Old Testament also, who proclaimed that there is no life after death and consequently, that which remains is for one to enjoy this life! However, those people were deluded; they were blinded by their wickedness and they never learnt the mysteries of God. The outcome of the righteous is not the same as the outcome of sinners: " ***But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. 2 In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was considered to be suffering, 3 and their going from us to be destruction, but they are at peace. 4 For even if in the sight of human beings they were punished, their hope is full of immortality, 5 and having been disciplined a little, they will be greatly benefited, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; 6 as gold in the furnace, he tested them, and as a sacrificial whole burnt offering, he accepted them. 7 And in the time of their visitation they will shine out, and as sparks through the stubble, they will run about. 8 They will judge nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will be king over them for ever.***" (Wisd.Solom.3:1-8. Cmp.Isaiah 57:2).

"But the impious will receive punishment in accordance with the way they reasoned, those who neglected the righteous person and revolted from the Lord" (Wisd.Solom.3:10).

"Then the righteous will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have afflicted them and those who make light of their labors. When they see them, they will be troubled with terrible fear and will be amazed at the unexpected salvation of the righteous. Repenting, they will say amongst themselves (and through distress of spirit will groan): "These are they whom we once held in derision and as a byword of reproach—we fools! We thought their life to be folly and their end to be without honor. How have they been counted amongst divine sons, and how is their lot amongst the holy ones? Surely, we strayed from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness did not shine on us, and the sun did not rise on us." (Wisd.Solom.5,1-6. cmp.Ezek.18:17; 27:32).

5. "Blessed is the path you walk today..."

Christ's victory over death and over the works of the devil places each Christian entirely differently in the face of the event that we continue to refer to as "natural death". However, that death has now lost its initial meaning, which had been acquired during the period of the devil's supremacy. For each genuine Christian it comprises the prelude of the true life. That is why the Fathers of the Church do not hesitate to characterize it as something benevolent. "Death is a good thing" says Saint Gregory of Nyssa. "***'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."*** (Revel.14:13)"*Blessed is the path that you walk today, for a place of rest has been prepared for you*..." chants the Church characteristically, during Her sacred service "*for those who have slept*".

With death, man's corruptible body is separated from the soul. It returns to the earth "from which it was taken", while the soul - the "spirit" - returns to God, "Who gave it" (Gen.1:27; 2:7; 3:19; Eccl.12:7). However, one day, the body will also be resurrected, to "***put on the image of the heavenly Man***" (1Cor.15:49). It will then be united once again - transformed - with the soul, so that "***we shall always be with the Lord***" (1 Thess.4:17; John 5:28-29).

"***So also, is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body***." (1 Cor.15:42-44).

"***We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality***." (1 Cor.15:51-53).

He therefore who believes is not afraid of death, for he is already living the new reality which was formed after the resurrection of Christ. He is aware that "even if he dies, he will live on", and "***whosoever lives and believes shall never die***" (John 11:26, 5:28-29). He will move on, to his true homeland - the one where he has been registered as a citizen. There he will be from there on, forever, with the Lord. (1 Thess.4:17)

The natural death of saintly people is always a happy event, which is why our Church commemorates the day of their departure with festivities. As a matter of fact, in order to stress this, the Church uses the

characteristic expression "....is perfected in peace..."; or, in the case of a martyr: "...is perfected by the sword..." etc..

A certain holy soul - which is now in heaven - always used to say in a jovial manner to friends after the funeral of a pious person: "Well, guys, here's looking forward to ours!" Only in this light can we comprehend why, during the era of persecutions, many Christians had sought the gift of martyrdom (Philip.1:29) and hurried to their martyrdom without any fear, filled with joy, as though they were going to a festival!

Saint Ignatius for example, who was led to Rome to be martyred, had written to the Christians of Rome, beseeching them to not attempt to rescue him from the mouths of the beasts: "*I fear your love might wrong me. Because for you it is easy to do that which you want; but for me, is difficult to reach God - if of course you don't show pity... therefore allow me to become food to the beasts, by which I shall be able to win God. God's wheat am I, and by the beasts' teeth I will be ground, to become clean bread for Christ. Rather, you should urge the beasts that they might become my grave and leave nothing of my body behind, in case I do not die and become a burden to someone. Only then will I be a true disciple of Christ: when the world does not even see my body. Beseech Christ for me, to become in this way a sacrifice to God... Forgive me; I know what is beneficial to me. I am now beginning to be Christ's disciple. Let nothing of the visible and the invisible hold me back from winning Christ... I am writing to you while still alive, and longing to die... Inside me there is "living water" which speaks to me and says to me: "Come to the Father!"*

6. Personal existence after death

It is necessary to even more underline our faith in the personal existence of man after death, because there are heretics who adulterate the Scriptural teachings. Some of them proclaim that man disappears after death. Then there are others, who teach that man's soul loses its personal existence after death. As we have seen, we have clear testimonies of postmortem life in its personal form in the Old Testament, however, these testimonies are not the only ones. When the Old Testament mentions the death of Abraham (Gen.25:8), of Isaac (Gen.35:29), of Jacob (Gen.49:33), it says characteristically that they were "added" to their people or "to their race" (cmp.also Num.20:24, 27:13, 31:2). King Saul converses with the spirit of the Prophet Samuel (1 Kings 28:15); The Prophet Elijah prays that the soul of the Sarepta widow's dead boy "returns" (3 Kings 17:21-22). That same Prophet beseeches the Lord to take his life: ***"And he went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under one rathm and asked that his soul die and said "Let it be enough now; indeed, take away my life from me, Lord, for I am no better than my fathers."*** (3 Kings 19:4).

In Proverbs 11:7 it says: " ***When a righteous man dies, hope does not perish, but the boast of the impious perishes.***" The Book of Maccabees says of the pious : "***since they believe that they do not die to God, even as our patriarchs Abraam, Isaak and Iakob did not die to God, but live to God***" (4 Macc.7:19; cmp.7:3, 9:8-9. 18:23; Ezek.18:17, 27:32; Eccl.12:7).

David expresses the jubilation of his heart for the presence of the Lord in his life and proclaims the steadfast faith that if he dies, even his body will be placed in the grave with the hope of its resurrection. He also underlines that God will not abandon his soul in Hades, nor will He allow his dedicated servant to know corruption: "***Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover, my flesh will encamp in hope, because you will not abandon my soul to Hades or give your devout to see corruption.***" (Psal.15:9-10; cmp. Psal.21:27).

Another Psalm says the following regarding impious people: "***Fool and dolt will perish together and leave their wealth to strangers. [...] And a person held in honor did not understand. He resembled senseless beasts and became like them. [...] Like sheep they were placed in Hades. Death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall exercise dominion over them at dawn, and help for them will grow old in Hades, away from their glory. On the other hand, God will ransom my soul from Hades' hand, when He receives me. Do not be afraid when a person becomes rich and when the glory of his house increases, because, when he dies, he will take nothing, nor will his glory go down with him, because in his life his soul will be blessed; he will acknowledge you when you treat him well; he will enter the company of his fathers; he will never again see light. A person held in honor did not understand. They were comparable to beasts and became like them.***" (Psal.48:11-21. Cmp. Ezek.32:30-31). We notice here that both the impious and the righteous will live after their death, in a conscious manner. Except that their fortunes will be the opposite of what they were during their present lifetimes. Even if they had enjoyed all the comforts and pleasures of this life, the impious will be miserable in the next, whereas the righteous will find themselves in the ranks of those who will reign. The Psalmist is certain of this new order; he believes deeply in the personal continuation of life, which is why he beseeches God to have mercyon his soul when he departs from this life: «***On the other hand, God will ransom my soul from Hades' hand, when He receives me***» (Psal.48:16). Christ used a similar example in order to denote the postmortem outcome of the impious, in His parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

From all the aforementioned we conclude that the Old Testament does not accept the views of the materialists of that era, who, as we are informed by the Book of Ecclesiastes (3:19-21), did not accept the immortality of the soul and proclaimed that there is no difference between man and beast: "***And who knows the spirit of humans, whether it ascends upward, and the spirit of cattle, whether it descends downward to the earth?***"(Eccl.3:21). The answer to this question by the materialists is given by Ecclesiastes: "***and the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to the God who gave it***." (Eccl.12:7). Besides these, in the New Testament there is the example of Moses and Elijah who - albeit having departed fro this life (Deut.34:5, 1 Kings 2:11) - appeared on the Mount of the Transfiguration and were seen by the three disciples, not in their sleep, but "fully awake", that is, alert (Luke 9:32). There is no doubt that the Holy Bible clearly teaches the conscious continuation of life after death, and not the annihilation of man, as taught by people of delusion. "***Today you shall be with Me in Paradise***", Christ had said to the grateful robber (Luke 23:43), indicating with this that the life of that repented sinner would continue on, in Paradise.

The Orthodox Church underlines Christ's triumphant descent into Hades, where "***...He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient***" (1 Pet.3:19-20). Those who were deceased before Christ, therefore, continued to have a personal existence, inasmuch as they were able to hear and to make a decision regarding in-Christ salvation. "***I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob***", God had said to Moses (Exod.3:6). Christ had made reference to this passage, adding: "***But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him***" - that is, all of them are alive (Luke 20:37-38; Matth.22:32; Mark 12:26-27; cmp 1 Macc.7:19, 18:23). When the Lord says that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are alive, He does not imply that they will be resurrected in the future, but that they continued to live, even after their death. "***And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die***" (John 11:26; 5:24). The continuation of personal life - even after death - becomes even clearer in John's Book of Revelation, which presents the souls of the martyrs beseeching God to put an end to tribulation and to the persecutions of their brethren on earth (Rev.6:9-10). The Apostle Paul expresses the same conviction about life after death: "***For to me, to***

live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you." (Philip.1:21-24; cmp.2 Cor.5:8).

The interpretation of this passage cannot be anything other than: the Apostle Paul believes that if he departed from this life, he would continue to exist personally, near Christ. However, for the sake of his brethren's love, he wanted to stay a little longer with them, in order to edify them in the faith. If Paul did not imply here that there was going to be a life near Christ immediately after his death, then this passage would have been incomprehensible. Also, incomprehensible would have been his dilemma, regarding whether he wanted to leave or stay behind.

From all the aforementioned Scriptural references therefore - and many others (see for example Matth.10:28; Luke 12:4; Jam.5:20) - it is deduced that the Holy Bible teaches the immortality of the soul in a personal sense.

7. The personal existence of wicked people

There are people who are cacodox, who do not believe in the personal existence of wicked people after death and maintain that they supposedly base their cacodoxy in the Holy Bible. However, the passages that they quote do not speak of the supposed "destruction" of the soul of wicked people; they actually refer to the death of the body, the destruction of all their plans (***designs***: Psalms 145:4) and the complete oblivion of their name from among the living (***the name of the impious is extinguished***: Prov.10:7)

We must not forget that the word "soul" has a double meaning in the Holy Bible (Matth.10:39, 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24, 17:33; John 12:25). It does not only signify the spiritual hypostasis of man, but the present life also (see also Mark 10:45; John 3:16), just as the word "death" does not only signify the end of this present life, but also man's separation from God, through sin (Matth.8:22; Luke 15:24, 32; Rom.5:12). So, the Holy Bible - as we can see - clearly teaches the postmortem existence of wicked people, who are tormented even before the second coming of the Lord (Psal.48:11-21; Ezek.32:30-31; Luke 16:19-31). " ***Fool and dolt will perish together and leave their wealth to strangers. And their graves are their homes forever, their coverts to generation and generation. They named their lands their own. And a person held in honor did not understand. He resembled senseless beasts and became like them. This way of theirs is a pitfall to them, and afterwards with their mouth they will express contentment. Like sheep they were placed in Hades. Death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall exercise dominion over them at dawn, and help for them will grow old in Hades, away from their glory. On the other hand, God will ransom my soul from Hades' hand, when he receives me. Do not be afraid when a person becomes rich and when the glory of his house increases, because, when he dies, he will take nothing, nor will his glory go down with him, because in his life his soul will be blessed; he will acknowledge you when you treat him well; he will enter the company of his fathers; he will never again see light. A person held in honor did not understand. They were comparable to beasts and became like them."***

Are the wicked people perhaps going to be destroyed during the second coming? The Lord's word is clear on this point also: "***...'Depart from Me, you cursed ones, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels***" the Lord will say to the wicked ones (Matth.25:41). What is that "***everlasting fire***"? Is it complete destruction, as the cacodox people assert? The answer to this question is given by the Holy Bible: "***And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever***." (Revel.20:10; cmp. Matth.8:12; Mark

9:43). This will therefore be the final, the eternal separation from God, Who is life; this the reason that it is characterized as "***the second death***" (Revel.21:8). Thus, that which is waiting for the wicked is not a "complete annihilation", but an eternal torment - an eternal separation from God. A second death.

8. The prayers for the deceased

The Church's belief in the personal existence after death, as well as the tender bond that connects us with our departed brethren, fully justifies the prayers and the memorial services performed for the deceased.

This is not an unfamiliar thing in the Holy Bible. The example of Judas the Maccabee is familiar, who had made a sin offering for the soldiers who had been killed. The Holy Bible underlines that it is based on the faith in the resurrection and in the personal existence after death, and characterizes it as a "holy and pious invention" - that is, a holy and pious thought: "***He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Hierosolyma to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead so that they might be delivered from their sins.***" (2 Macc.12:43-45).

9. The Second Coming of the Lord

"...'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven'..." (Acts 1:11). This was the message that Christ's disciples had received, regarding the second coming of the Lord. When is this coming going to take place? Well, there are cacodox people who dare to define that point in time. This problem was already being confronted in the Old Testament by Daniel, who had prophesied about End Times: "***And I heard and did not understand, and I said, 'Lord, what will be the end of these things?'"*** Daniel asked. To which the Lord replied: ***'Go, Daniel, for the words have been barred and sealed until the time at the end.*** (Daniel 12:8-9).

The disciples had posed the same question to Christ: " ***'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'***" (Matth.24:3). "***And Jesus answered and said to them: Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many***." (Matth.24:4-5, 23:26; Mark 13:5-6, 21-23. Cmp.Matth.7:15; Luke 21:8). "***It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority"*** (Acts 1:7). "***But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father***." (Mark 13:32). The Day of the Lord will come "***as a thief in the night***" - that is, at a moment that no-one suspects (2 Pet.3:10).

From the above passages it becomes obvious that the determination of the time of the Lord's Second Coming is not a matter for Christ's genuine followers - for true Christians. Christ clearly said "***It is not for you to know***" (Acts 1:7) In fact, whoever attempts it, and even dares to make it the subject of a sermon, is deluded and also leads into delusion those who give credence to his words. The Lord warns us that we must "***take heed***".

No-one therefore knows the time of the Second Coming. What we do know however, is that that day will come, and that Christ's presence will be visible to everyone, and not invisible as the distorters of the Holy

Bible's meaning assert. He "***will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven'...”*** said the angels to the disciples (Acts 1:11). He will be seen by "***all the tribes of the earth***" (Matth.24:30): not only by the righteous but also by the wicked - even the ones who had crucified Him (Revel.1:7. Cmp. Zachar.12:10). He will come "***in His glory***"; before Him "***all the nations***" will be gathered, and He will separate the innocent from the wicked: "A***nd these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life"*** (Matth.25:31-46. Cmp. also 8:11-12; 13:41-43; 47:50; 2 Thess.1:7-10; Daniel 12:2-3).

The resurrection therefore of the dead will be all-encompassing, the only difference being that the righteous will be raised unto life, whereas the wicked will be raised unto judgment. "***Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.***" (John 5:28-29; Matth.25:46. Cmp. Isaiah 26:19; Ezek.37:1-14; Daniel12:2-3).

10. Take heed, lest anyone deceive you

As we have seen, the Lord does not confine Himself to the reassurance that His Coming will take place at an unexpected moment to mankind. He also underlines that we must take heed, because persons will present themselves, who will try to lead us astray (Matth.24:4, 11; Mark 13:22). These are persons who have in fact appeared in our time, maintaining that they are a "canal" or a "channel" of God's. and that "Jehovah God" "channels His light" to mankind, and "His truth" through that "canal". These people do not simply support an invisible Coming of the Lord - which, as we mentioned, is entirely opposite to what the Holy Bible teaches - but they even go "from house to house" in order to preach the "good news" of an "established kingdom". "The Time of the Nations has come" they proclaim; "the second coming took place in the year 1914". The preaching about the "kingdom" began after the first World War! It is obvious that these people fall into the category that Matthew mentioned in ch.24:23-27: "***...Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore, if they say to you 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it."*** The gospel therefore of these people is not the "good news" that the Apostles preached; instead, it is "another gospel", which leads to perdition (Gal.1:6-9)

The Kingdom that the Holy Bible speaks of began to be preached from the time of John (Luke 16:16), and not 1914. The Holy Bible further informs us that upon the completion of "the time of the nations", the return of the Israelite people will follow, then the Lord will come (Luke 21:24-27; Rom.11:25-33. Cmp.Luke 13:35; Matth.23:39; Zach.12:10). This coming has not yet taken place. Therefore the "established kingdom" is a delusion.

However, mention of false prophets is not made only in the New Testament; they are a danger that is pointed out in vivid colours by the Prophets of the Old Testament also. Just like the false prophets of today, the false prophets of the Old Testament era used to proclaim that they spoke in God's name. In reality however, just like the contemporary ones, they too speak according to the will of their heart, with the intent to deceive the people. God warns these "prophets", that their punishment will be a terrible one, and their end ridiculed. That is why He commanded His people not to heed the voice of these wicked people:

"***And the Lord said to me: The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, and I did not command them and did not speak to them, because they are prophesying to you lying visions and***

divinations and omens and preferences of their own heart. Therefore this is what the Lord says concerning the prophets who prophesy lies in my name, and I did not send them, who say, "Dagger and famine shall not come on this land": By a sickly death they shall die, and by famine the prophets shall come to an end. And the people, to them to whom they prophesy, they also shall be thrown out in the streets of Ierousalem, before the dagger and the famine, and there shall be no one to bury them—and their wives and their sons and their daughters. And I will pour out their evil upon them." (Jerem.14:14-16).

" ***And a word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, and you shall prophesy and say to them: "Hear a word of the Lord!" This is what the Lord says: Woe to those who prophesy from their heart and perhaps do not see at all. Your prophets are like foxes in the deserts, O Israel. They did not stand upon a solid body and gather flocks to the house of Israel. Those who say, "In the day of the Lord" did not stand up. Those who say, "The Lord says" are seers of falsehoods and diviners of vanities, and the Lord has not sent them, and they began to set up their own word.***" (Ezek.13:1-6).

"***This is what the Lord says against the prophets who lead my people astray, who bite with their teeth and announce peace to him, and nothing has been given into their mouth; they have raised up war against him. Therefore, it shall be night to you without vision and darkness to you without divination. The sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them; those who see dreams shall be disgraced, and the diviners shall be mocked; they shall all speak against them, for no one will listen to them."*** (Mic.3:5-7. see also Zach.13:2-5).

" ***Thus, says the Lord Almighty: Do not hear the words of the prophets, because they are rendering a vision empty. They speak from their own heart and not from the mouth of the Lord. They say to those who reject the word of the Lord, "There shall be peace for you," and to all who walk by their own will, [to every one who walks by the error of his own heart,] they said, "No evil shall come upon you"—*** " (Jerem.23:16-17).

The same warning is given - as we mentioned - to the new people of God also: to us Christians: " ***"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.***" (Matth.7:15). "***stay away from such people***" (1 Tim.6:5). The Apostle refers to them as "***false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."*** (2 Cor.11:13-15).

But how can one discern the false teachings of cacodox people?

The Apostle replies to this question, stating that heretics distort Christ's Gospel; that is, they preach a new gospel, of their own. " ***But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.***" (Gal.1:8-9. cmp. Deuter.13:1-6).

The truth of the Gospel was "***delivered to the Saints, once and forever***" (Jud.3; Matth.5:18-19), and therefore cannot change, "depending on current circumstances" - as people of delusion are wont to say - asserting that God Himself sends them a "more vivid light", and for that reason, they revise their erroneous views! God's word however is absolutely clear on this point: "***But if you say in your heart, "How***

will we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?" whatever the prophet might speak in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place and does not happen, this is the word that the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken it in impiety; you shall not follow him." (Deuter.18:21-22).

11. The Upper Jerusalem

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, [...] Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. [...] Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. [...] Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Then one of the seven angels [....] came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God." (Revel.Ch.20, 21)

"***But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.***"
(Revel.21:22-27).

"***[...]And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.***" (Revel.22:1-5; Cmp. Isaiah 60:1-22).

12. For the perishable must don imperishability

The resurrection that the Holy Bible describes is not only a resurrection of souls, but also of bodies. Our mortal body shall be garbed with imperishability and thus fulfill the prophetic word, that is, that death was devoured and conquered (Isaiah 25:8; Hos.13:14; Revel.20:14): "***So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so, it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the***

natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— [in] a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting?O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor.15:42-58. Cmp. Rom.6:3-14).

The Prophet Ezekiel sees the realization of this resurrection of the bodies and the defeat of the realm of death: "***The hand of the Lord***" leads the Prophet to a plain

And the hand of the Lord came upon me, and the Lord brought me out in a spirit and set me in the midst of the plain, and this was full of human bones, and he brought me all around them in a circle, and behold, very many, very dry, upon the surface of the plain. And he said to me, "Son of man, shall these bones live?" And I said, "O Lord, you know these things." And he said to me, Prophesy over these bones, and you shall say to them: O dry bones, hear a word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says to these bones: Behold, I am bringing into you a spirit of life, and I will give sinews on you and bring flesh upon you and draw out skin over you and give my breath into you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord. And I prophesied as he commanded me. And it happened, when I prophesied, and behold, a shaking, and he brought forth the bones, each to its joint. And I looked, and behold, sinews and flesh were growing upon them, and skin was coming up upon them, on top, but no breath was in them. And he said to me, Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, This is what the Lord says: Come from the four winds, and blow into these corpses, and they shall live. And I prophesied just as he commanded me. And the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, a very great gathering. And the Lord spoke to me, saying: Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel, and they say, "Our bones have become dry; our hope has perished; we are lost." Therefore, prophesy, and say, This is what the Lord says: Behold, I am opening your tombs and will bring you up out of your tombs and bring you into the land of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves so that I might bring my people up out of their graves. And I will give my spirit into you, and you shall live, and I will place you upon your own land, and you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will act, says the Lord. " (Ezek.37:1-14).

13. The children of the Kingdom

In the Holy Bible there is no predetermined number of people who are to enter the Kingdom of heaven, as the distorters of the truth assert. The desire of the Lord is clear: "***Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled***." (Luke 14:23).

When John's Book of Revelation mentions that the number of those who are sealed is twelve thousand from each one of the twelve tribes of Israel (in total 144.000 - see Revel.7:4-8), it is not possible to take this

number literally. The reason for this is that in the word of God, no discrimination is made between Jews and Gentiles. On the contrary, the Holy Bible underlines that "***There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus***."(Gal.3:28). "***But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God***." (John 1:12-13). No-one enters the Kingdom of heaven on the basis of their fleshly origin, but on the basis of their spiritual rebirth (=born of God). "***Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.***" (Matth.7:21).

Consequently, the meaning of the verse of Revelation is a symbolic one; the number 12 (and even more so the number 12 x 12 x 1000 = 144.000) signifies fullness: that those who will be saved are an innumerable multitude, and that they will come from all the tribes and all the nations of the world. This innumerable multitude are those who have done "good works", so that their name be included in the "book of life" (Revel.20:12-15; Dan.7:10). Those good works are not about announcing the "good news of an established Kingdom", as maintained by people under delusion; they are about "***faith, working through love***" (Gal.5:6; Jam.2:14-26) - the living faith, which should be expressed through works of love and philanthropy, not only towards brethren, but towards any person who is in need (Luke 10:25-27; Matth.25:34-40) - even if that person is our enemy (1 Kings 24:20; Job 31:29; Prov.24:17, 25:21; Rom.12:20-21; Matth.5:44-48, 23:23; Luke 6:27-36). The number therefore of the members of God's Kingdom is not predetermined, nor is it limited. Each and every Christian bears that hope, and no-one has the right to deprive him of that hope. (Colos.2:18-19).

Indeed: Christ sent forth His disciples to all the nations, so that they might preach the Gospel to everyone, and to baptize all people -without exception- who would believe, and after they had been taught that they must uphold the Lord's commandments in their lives (Matth.28:19-20; cmp.1 Tim.2:4).

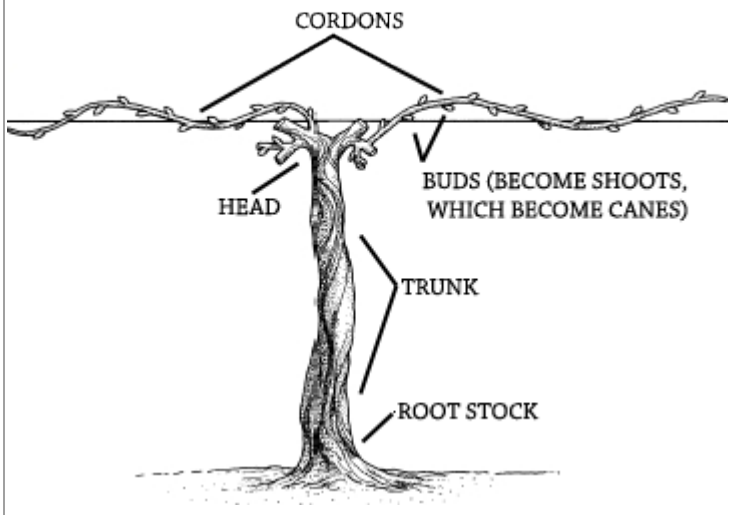
The Prophet Jeremiah says that God will gather once again the "remnant of the sheep" into one flock, and that this remnant will multiply: "***And it is I who will receive those remaining of my people from every land, there where I have driven them, and I will restore them to their pasture, and they shall increase and multiply***." (Jerem.23:3) Jeremiah's prophecy has been realized, with the event of the Incarnation and the Resurrection of the Lord and the gathering "in Christ" of the scattered children of God (John 11:52, 17:20-26). "***And other sheep I have" -*** said the Lord Himself ***- "which are not of this fold*** (that is, they are not Israelites, but Gentiles)***; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd***." (John 10:16; cmp.Ezek.34:23, 37,24)One flock, united in the presence of God's throne, and not two flocks - the one supposedly on earth and the other in heaven, as maintained by people under delusion - and that one flock will be comprised of an innumerable multitude - not of a specific number: Says John's Revelation: "***After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb***" (Revel.7:9) All of that great multitude that John saw was not on earth; it was in heaven, standing before the throne of God, and "***before the Lamb***". They are the children of the Kingdom of God.

14. About "Hell"

The Prophet Malachi speaks of the day of the Lord: "***For behold, a day is coming, burning like an oven, and it will set them ablaze, and all the aliens and all those who do lawless things will be stubble, and the day that comes shall kindle them, says the Lord Almighty...***" (Malach.4:1). This punishment does not

signify a total disappearance and destruction, but an eternal "hell" (Revel.14:10-11, 20:10; Matth.8:12; Mark 9:43).

OODE note: The ending of Malachi's passage 4:1 says ".... ***and there shall be left of them neither root nor branch***". This does NOT imply a complete extermination, as some people imagine. It says NOTHING about the main body (the trunk, the vine itself) being exterminated: only the roots and branches. The roots and branches are those extensions of the main body which - through transplanting - can sprout offshoots and produce new, similar plants. What the ending of the passage says, is that the unrepentant ones who will be placed in the fire will be "barren" (stubble): they will never again sprout any new works of iniquity, nor will they have emulators. That the branches and roots are one thing and the body another (which by the way is NOT mentioned in this passage as being exterminated, therefore they remain in an eternal "fire", given that we are talking about the future state of incorruptibility) can be seen in the words of the Lord Himself: " ***'I am the true vine [...] Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.[...] If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.***" (John 15:1,2,6). Here, we can clearly see the contradistinction between the vine (trunk) and the branches of the vine.



In the Coming Age, everyone will have "trunks" (incorruptible bodies) - thus, one could imagine a vast forest of "trees", where the "accursed" (damned) will be dried-out tree trunks, unable to suffer the presence of the Light of God's love because they will experience it eternally as a consuming fire and in parallel as a constant, painful reminder of their impenitence; as opposed to the saved ones, who will be in the same "forest", but

as "trees" filled with life, with (spiritual) branches stretching forever longingly towards the (same, but life-giving) Light, which will give them eternal spiritual "growth".

What does this "hell" consist of? The Holy Bible teaches that sin is the "***sting of death***" (1 Cor.15:56) and that "***when it is full-grown, brings forth death***" (James 1:15. cmp. Luke 15:24, 32) - meaning man's separation from life (that is, from Christ). (John 1:4, 11:25) Just as man distances himself from God when he sins in this lifetime, he likewise distances himself from God after death and is unable to look upon the face of God and feel pleasure. The Fathers of the Church say that a wicked person is unable to even look upon the face of his brother; that he lives the sensation of loneliness very intensely - which to him is an inexpressible "hell". A characteristic example of this matter is an incident narrated in the "Gerontikon" (Book on Elders), from the life of Abba Makarios:

"Said Abba Makarios: One time, when I was walking in the desert, I found the skull of a dead man which had been thrown on the ground. I moved it a little with my staff and the skull spoke to me. Then I asked it: 'Who are you?' The skull replied: 'I used to be a priest of idols and of Hellenes who used to live in this place. And you are Makarios, the Spirit-bearer. When you show mercy to those who are in hell and you pray for them too, they are comforted a little.' Then the Elder said: 'What is the difference between comfort and hell?' And the skull replied: 'As far as the sky is from the earth, thus far is the fire that is below us who are inside that fire, from head to toe. And no-one is able to see the other face to face; it is as though one's back is stuck to another's back. Thus, when you pray for us, one is able to see the other's face for a little - that is the comfort.' Then the elder wept and said: 'Woe to the day that man was born.' Then he said to the skull: 'Is there any worse torture?' And the skull replied: 'A greater torture is below us.' The Elder asked: 'And who are there?' The skull replied: 'We who had not become acquainted with God, are shown mercy, even if a little. But those who have known God and denied Him and did not do His will, they shall be below us.' (cmp. Matth.11:22-24, 2Pet.2:21)*. Then the Elder took the skull and buried it."*

This simple narration of the "Gerondikon" reveals all the horror that the unjust and wicked people will experience; those who did not remain faithful to the love and the communion with God and their brethren but had wronged and betrayed that love. Those people, who will not be living in communion with the Triune God, will not be able to look upon the others' faces. They will be deprived of that which they had rejected in their lifetime: the true communion with God and their brethren and the inexpressible joy that will be the fruit of that communion (see Revel.21:7-8, 22:4, 14,15). The narration further expresses the power of the prayers of the Church and the holy persons for the deceased. Those prayers offer comfort, even to idolaters.

15. Oh, what an hour that will be!

Our Church reminds us of the terrible truth about the condemnation of the irreverent, especially during the Sunday prior to the beginning of Lent, when the commemoration of the Lord's Second Coming is performed during the Service:

"*Oh, what a terrible hour and day then, when the judge will sit upon an awesome throne! Books will be opened, and acts will be checked, and the hidden things of darkness will be made public; angels will hasten around, gathering all the nations. Come, hearken, kings and rulers, slaves and free, sinners and righteous, rich and indigent, for the Judge is coming Who will judge all the World. And who will be able to sustain the presence of His wrath, when angels are present, checking our acts, our thoughts, our remembrances, of the night and of the*

day? Oh, what an hour it will be then! But, before the end reaches us, hasten o my soul, crying out: 'God, turnabout, save me, as the only merciful One'! "

"*My soul, my soul, rise up, why do you sleep? The end is approaching, and you will be alarmed. Recover, therefore, so that Christ our God will spare you, Who is Omnipresent and All-fulfilling."* (Kontakion of Holy Thursday of the Major Canon)

16. Paradise

The simple narration from the life of Abba Makarios does not only reveal the "vast chasm" that separates the people of iniquity (cmp.Luke 16:26) - that is, the horrific state of "hell"; it also suggests the grandeur of the glory of the children of God's Kingdom. The damned will be not be able to even look upon the face of their brother. But the righteous, who will be basking in "***the bosom of Abraham***" (Luke 16:22-23), will forever be "***with the Lord***" (1 Thess.4:17) and will be looking upon His glorified countenance (Revel.22:4; 1 Cor.13:12; 1 John 3:2; cmp.Psal.16:15). The Apostle Paul says that He will come, " ***in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe***" (2 Thess.1:10)

The Lord's relationship with His people will be so close, that the Church is presented as the bride - the "***bride of the Lamb***" (Revel.21:9. cmp. Matth.22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24). This is the "***joy of our Lord***", in which the righteous will be invited to enter (Matth.25:21. cmp. Rom.2:6-10; Psal.15:11). To stress this inexpressible joy and bliss, John's Revelation mentions that the righteous will bear on their forehead "***the name of God***" (Revel.22:4); that is, they will be partaking of the divine glory - "***they will shine like the sun***" (Matth.13:43).

This is the manner in which the opus of man's salvation will be completed, as described by Christ to His disciples and especially in His prayer to the Father: "***At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you***." (John 14:20). "***Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him***" (John 14:23). "***Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, so that they may be one, as We are***." (John 17:11)

"***"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me.And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*** (John 17:20-26)

17. Γρηγορείτε!

"***Trumpet with a trumpet in Sion; make proclamation on my holy mountain! And let all the inhabitants of the land be confounded, for the day of the Lord has come, because it is near!***" the Prophet Joel cries out (Joel 2:1).

Christ Himself warns us: "*be therefore watchful, for you do not know at what hour your Lord comes... For this, you too should be ready, for the hour upon which you do not expect, the Son of Man will come...*"

"Who then is the faithful and prudent servant whom the Lord assigned as the ruler over the household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matth.24:45-51).

Christ's admonition of "***be watchful!***" is addressed to all Christians without exception, and not to a predetermined order, as certain people under delusion maintain. This is made obvious by other passages also, with the same content. For example, in the parable of the talents we see each servant receiving a certain number of talents for the purpose of working conscientiously and carefully, in order to increase them. Whoever proves himself worthy of the Lord's trust and increases the talent that was entrusted to him is praised by the Lord and is characterized as a "well-intentioned servant". But the one who shows negligence and laziness is reproached and characterized as a "wicked servant" (Matth.25:14-30. Cmp.Luke 19:11-27). The Holy Bible furthermore mentions that each member of the Church receives its own particular charisma for the purpose of using it to edify their brethren and the entirety of the Church, and not for their own comfort and their personal interest. (1 Cor.12:4-31; 14:12) Thus, both in Matthew 24:42-51, as well as in Luke 12:35-48, Christ does not refer to a specific category of faithful, but to all Christians. He invites each and every one to minister to brethren with their own talent, and not to use it for their personal pleasure. That is the way they will prove themselves to be the "faithful and wise servant" and become a partaker of the Kingdom of God (a custodian of all his belongings). If, on the contrary, he shows indifference, he will prove himself to be a wicked servant, whom the Lord will condemn to an eternal condemnation... " ***For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been entrusted, of him they will ask much more***." (Luke 12:48). No-one, therefore, is a "faithful and prudent servant" in advance. Each Christian has to be watchful, in order to become a faithful and dedicated servant in the eyes of God - a genuine child of His Kingdom.

The Apostles and all the Saints of our Church had that watchfulness, throughout their entire lives and up until their last living breath.

The Apostle Paul refers to his personal struggle to make the Resurrection of Christ his own acquisition, by underlining: "***Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus***." (Philip.3:12-14).

Very moving is the example of Abba Agathon on this matter, as mentioned in the "Gerondikon", where it says: "*He strived to observe all of the commandments; if he took a boat, he would be the first to take the oars. And when the brothers would approach, he would stop his praying immediately and set the table for them, for he was full of love. When he was about to die, he remained with eyes wide open for three days, without moving them at all. Then the brothers nudged him, and said to him: Abba Agathon, where are you? And he then replied to them: Until now, I spent all my strength keeping God's commandments. But I am human; how do I know if my*

work has appeared pleasing to God? Then the brothers replied: Don't you believe in your work - that it was in accordance with God's will? And the Elder replied: I will not presume to be so bold, until I have faced God. Because God's criterion is different to the criterion of humans. At the moment that they wanted to ask him something more, he said to them: Exercise yourselves in love, do not talk with me anymore, for I have work to do... And in that way, he departed with joy; because they saw him ascending, the way that one gets up to greet their friends and loved ones. He had great watchfulness in everything, and would say that without vast mercy, man cannot achieve a single virtue."

Abba Agathon's example reminds us of that characteristic blessing from the sacred Mystery of the Unction, which repeats the following prophetic words: "*If You come with judgment to Your servants, there will not be found anyone clean of filth, but every mouth shall close and have nothing to plead, because all of our righteous acts are, before God, like the unclean rag of a woman. For this reason, Lord, do not remember the sins of our youth.*" (Cmp.Isaiah 64:6).

"***we have sinned, done wrong, acted lawlessly and rebelled and turned aside from your commandments and from your ordinances***" confesses the Prophet Daniel before God. (Dan.9:5; cmp.Prov.20:9)

18. Whosoever thinks he stands, should take care lest he fall

"***Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.***" (1 Cor.10:12). Man must be aware that only the mercy of God saves him. However, that awareness does not signify a passive condition. It is translated as alertness and struggle.

The Prophet Ezekiel receives the command to proclaim that God fervently desires the return of the sinner; that each one who returns from his sinful life will live, and his previous sins will not be taken into account; and that on the contrary, if a pious person relies on his own righteousness and sins, he will be condemned, without his previous, virtuous life benefiting him in the least.

"***Now you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus you spoke, saying, "Our errors and lawless acts are with us, and in them we waste away. And how will we live?" Say to them, I live, says the Lord; I do not wish the death of the impious, rather that the impious turn back from his way and he live. Turn back from your way by turning back, and why are you dying, O house of Israel? Say to the sons of your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in whatever day he err, and the lawlessness of the impious shall not harm him on whatever day he turn back from his lawlessness, and the righteous shall not be able to be saved. When I say to the righteous, "He trusts in his righteousness," and should he commit lawlessness, none of his righteous acts shall be recalled in his injustice that he has committed; in it he shall die. And when I say to the impious, "By death you shall be put to death, and you shall turn back from your sin," and should he perform judgment and righteousness and restore a pledge and give back robbery, walk in the ordinances of life so as not to do what is wrong, by life he shall live, and he shall not die;***" (Ezek.33:10-15).

The faithful therefore, no matter how progressed he is in spiritual living, is called to a continuing struggle. How opposite indeed is the behaviour of certain heretics, who proclaim that they are (already) saved! They never understood the following words of the Holy Bible: "... ***work out your own salvation with fear and trembling***" (Phil.2:12; see also 3:8-12). So, we must attend to our salvation with toil and labour; it must be a permanent feature for us. However, our support and our hope are not found in the virtues that we may have - even if we practice them throughout our entire life. The only hope that remains is the

mercy and the love of God, Who saves every returning (repented) sinner, without taking his past into account; just as He also condemns everyone who veers away from spiritual living, basing himself on his past virtue - that is, relying on himself and not on the mercy and the love of God the Father.

19. Come, Lord Jesus!

The Lord will come, and we shall reign with Him - not in a material Kingdom of course, as people under delusion assert - but in a spiritual Kingdom (Matth.22:29-30; John 18:36; Rom.14:17; 1 Cor.6:13, 15:51-53, 2:9, e.a.)

And even if we do not know when the Lord will come, it is our duty to work towards accelerating His Coming. In other words, we are obliged to give witness for the Gospel "in all the world", preparing for the coming of Christ (Matth.24:14; Mark 13:10).

Each and every Christian is in a state of anticipation. The Church is the pure bride, who longingly awaits the arrival of Her Bridegroom, Who is the "***One Who is, and the One Who was, and Who cometh***" - the One Who exists, the One Who pre-existed, and the One Who is coming (Revel.1:8; cmp.Exod.3:14).

And this anticipation is based on a certain hope - on the very promise of the heavenly Bridegroom: "***Yes, I come swiftly!***"

"***Amen, yes, come, Lord Jesus!***" is the reply of the Church and of every faithful (Revel.22:20).

Chapter 27 - Our Present Homeland

1. The foretaste of God's Kingdom

Our true homeland is the one that we "***seek***" (Hebr.13:14). However, for the time being we are called upon to live on this earth. So, what kind of association do we have with this world?

The Lord, Who is the eternal life (1 John 1:2), with His Incarnation revealed Himself to us as God incarnated. (John 1:14; 1 Tim.3:16).

In this way, the Logos of God - the second Person of the Holy Trinity - enters into the world and sanctifies it. In this way, a new era arises for mankind and for the entire world - a period that inducts us into the Kingdom of God. The Lord Himself reassures us that the Kingdom of God does not belong exclusively to the future, but that it has already begun for every Christian from this very lifetime (Luke 17:21). The commencement of this Kingdom is revealed through Christ's actions against the powers of evil that dominate the world. (Matth.12:28, Luke 11:20)

However, the present time is not per se the Kingdom of God fulfilled... or finalized. It is only an image, an indicator, a prelude to the Kingdom of God, which will be revealed in all its radiance in End Times, with the presence of the Lord (Revel.20:11-22, 5; Isaiah 60:1-22).

Christians however live within the light of the Kingdom, even if they aren't as yet bathed whole in that light; even if they do not appear or are not always "wholly light" and "wholly fire", as we often notice in the lives of the Saints of our Church.

2. Christians' association to the world

"***You are the light of the world***" (Matth.5:14; cmp. Philip.2:15-16); "***you are the salt of the earth***" (Matth.5:13). These words by Christ determine Christians' relationship to the world. Christians are the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the spiritual leaven of the world (Matth.13:33; Luke 13:21; 1 Cor.5:6 e.a.). In other words, for the world, Christians are the heart and the ones who re-give the world its true meaning, so that it might "***be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God***" (Rom.8:21).

"*What the soul is to the body, that is what Christians are to the world*", says an ancient Christian text: the Epistle to Diognetus. "*The soul is enclosed in the body, but it holds the body together. Christians are likewise contained by the world as if inside a garrison, however it is they who keep the world together.*"

This is the reason that Christ does not ask the Father to remove Christians from the world, but rather to guard them from the evil one (John 17:15), who, after the Fall, had become "***the ruler of this world***" (John 12:31, 14:30).

Christians cannot remain unconcerned before the daily toils of man confronting the needs of life: "***Go to the ant, O lazybones,and zealously observe its ways, and become wiser than it; for without having any cultivated land nor anyone that forces it nor being under any master, it prepares its food in summer, and it makes its provision plentiful in harvest time. Or go to the bee and learn how industrious she is and how seriously she performs her work...***" (Prov.6:6-8. Cmp.10:4, 20:4, 21:25).

However, Christians' duty does not finish with their persistent toil for confronting of their own needs and their fellow-men's problems. Christians' missionary labour in the world is to expel the demonic element with Christ's presence and to restore the entire world once again as a glorification to God. Prior to the Fall, man had been placed in Paradise by God Himself, "***to till it and keep it***" (Gen.2:15), so that he could be the master over all of Creation (Gen.1:28. Cmp.Wisd.Sirach 17:2-4; Wisd.Solom.10:2; Psal.8:1-10). But man did not keep his regal and hieratic place in the world; he ceased to have God as his point of orientation and thus led all of Creation to the Fall.

This Mission, from which Adam fell away, is now given once again to the man of the new Creation and is characterized in the Holy Bible as a "***ministry of reconciliation***" between the world and God (2 Cor.5:18). The entire world must be transformed, and in fact in a dual sense. Man is called upon to labour, in order to discover the mystical powers of the world; to transform them and to effectively confront the problems of his daily living. In this point, man's potentials are incomparable, because he is an image of God and he partakes to a certain measure in the divine omnipotence. This fact therefore -of his being an image of God- elevates man to a degree incomparably higher than any philosophical and humanitarian system. Consequently, there is no issue of boundaries and barriers -either with regard to man's degree of development, or to the immense responsibility that he bears for the vindication and the awarding of his own person, his own works, and of the entire world (cmp.Psal.8:1-10).

Once, man had dragged all of Creation down with him to the Fall and to corruption, because he had ceased to offer it as a glorification of God and to ask God's blessing for its use (Gen.2:16-17). In this manner, the man of the new Creation is called upon to also transform himself in this sense, as well as his works and the entire world, and to place it properly in relation to God (cmp.Deuter.8:12-18; 1 Suppl.29:14-16).

Christ's disciples are called upon to descend from Mount Tabor, after having acquired the certainty of transformation (transfiguration). They must travel into the world in order to transform the world, so that everything can become "***new***" (Matth.17:1-8; 2 Cor.5:17).

How, then, is it possible for Christians to separate their responsibilities towards the world? How can they abandon the world, if they had received the specific instruction to remain in the world (John17:15), especially when given such a huge Mission?

3. Christians' social responsibility

Each Christian's purpose is to live "triadically": their life has to actually become the image of the life of the Holy Trinity. In other words, each Christian's purpose is to live together with his brethren, or, better still, "within his brother", because the Father is likewise "in the Son" and the Son is "in the Father", just as the Holy Spirit is "in the Father and in the Son" (cmp. John 17:21). This is the reality that the faithful are called upon to live during the Divine Liturgy, and to transform that reality in practice during their everyday lives (cmp.1 Cor.10:16-17). During the Divine Liturgy, man and all of Creation re-live that forsaken unity, because everything is assumed in the resurrected Body of Christ; everything is once again offered to God as a thanksgiving (cmp. Zechar.14:20-21). "*Our selves and each other and our entire life let us appose to Christ the Lord!*" is a prayer that is repeated often during the Divine Liturgy. There are no margins here for selfishness. The centre once again becomes "Christ our God" - ou centre, and our brother's, and our entire life's.

We thus know that Christ presents Himself daily to us, in a very specific manner: in the person of a brother, who awaits the fruits of our labors and our toil so that he may receive relief and be able to breathe. Our entire life, all our might and our potentials should be "in Christ", and this, through our brethren (Matth.25:40) - in the service of our brethren. And these potentials are unlimited, because man is -as we mentioned- an image of the All-wise and Omnipotent God, and as such, he also participates in His All-wisdom and His Omnipotence (cmp.Gen.1:28; Psal.8:1-10; Wisd.Sirach 17:2-4; Wisd.Solom.10:2).

Who can now no longer show concern for this life? For the wounds of mankind and of the world?

Of course a Christian is invited to a freedom and a superior position opposite the world; the Apostle Paul goes as far as characterizing everything as "chaff" (rubbish) when compared to the unique treasure, which is Christ (Philip.3:8. However this does not give us the right to separate our responsibilities for the fate of the world and the scorching problems of our brethren.

If the word of God calls us to weep with those who weep (Rom.12:15), then our attempts for effectively helping our brethren should be an even more imperative. Let us recall at this point the words of James: "***If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?***" (James 2:15-16. cmp.Isaiah 58:1-14).

4. The vindication of Monasticism

However, if things are indeed thus, then how is monasticism -one's departure from the world- justified?

Monasticism is not outside the purpose that we just mentioned, because a true monk does not live internally segregated from the world, nor has he abandoned his responsibility towards the world. He lives for the entire world, which he feels deeply connected to. His Mission and his gift are found in his being a prophet and a herald of the Kingdom that is to come: a living image and proof of the life to come.

In the life of the world a monk is an indicator which is orientated towards the heavens, revealing to the world another reality: the reality of heaven. That is his most significant offering to the world. And this offering is truly a great one, especially in our day and age, where everything is orientated towards the earth and as such, destined to be condemned to die!

Chapter 28 - The Liturgical Year

1. The Eighth Day

"***And God saw all the things that He had made, and see, they were exceedingly good. And it came to be evening, and it came to be morning, a sixth day***. [...] And ***God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it He ceased from all his works that God had begun to make***. (Gen.1:31, 2:3)

Man, in this manner was called upon by God to likewise sanctify the seventh day and to participate in the joy over Creation's beauty. However, that world lapsed into sin and its beauty was befouled. Consequently, the seventh day could no longer remain a day of joy over Creation's beauty. Man, and the entire cosmos thereafter began to live in a period of sorrow and exile (Gen.3:16-24).

However, with the Incarnation and more especially with the Resurrection of Christ, man and the entire cosmos entered into a new period. A new day dawned, and that day was the day of the Resurrection - the Day of the Lord - the "Eighth Day" (cmp.Hebr.4:1-11). The Incarnation, the Death and the Resurrection of Christ signified the abolition of the old period and the commencement of the new one: the period of resurrection and joy.

"***Rejoice, o highly favoured one; the Lord is with you!***" (Luke 1:28) the Angel said to the Virgin, thus linking joy to the event of man's reconciliation with God.

"***Rejoice!***" was the first word with which Christ addressed the women after His Resurrection (Matth.28:9), by which He linked joy to the event of the Resurrection.

2. The liturgical year

All of the events that we celebrate in our Church are located within the new Time, which had been transformed in the light of Christ's Resurrection. During the divine Liturgy, we experience the overall ("catholic") unity with our brethren and with all of Creation: with the Body of Christ as the centre - with the

God-human life of the Lord. However, the Holy Virgin Mary also belongs in that same God-human Body, as do all the Saints of our Church (cmp.Ephes.1:22, 5:23; Coloss.1:18, 24; John 10:16; 1 Cor.10:16-17; Galat.3:27-28; Ephes.4, 5:30).

The life of the Saints is Christ's very life, which is being continued throughout the ages. We are linked to them, based on our common, human nature - which Christ had set upright once again with His Incarnation, His Death and His Resurrection. Thus, during divine worship - and especially during the divine Liturgy - we participate in all of the events of Christ's life and the Saints' lives, because we all - together with the Saints and with Christ - constitute one Body; we are all "***one, in Christ Jesus***" (Galat.3:28).

With the feasts of our Church, we do not merely "remember" Christ and the Saints; we are not "***led to***" the events of divine Providence and to the lives of the Saints; we secretly experience those events and actually participate in the life of Christ and in the life of the Saints. This is why the hymns of our Church do not "report" to the past, but always to the present:

"*Today, He is being hung upon wood!*" (the Crucifixion)

"*For today the time of the feast is upon us and a chorus of Angels is worshipping with us***!**" (the Epiphany)

This word - "today" - is not a figure of speech; it is a mystical truth in the hearts of the faithful. All of the sacred persons are present. We interact spiritually with them and we actually experience all the events that we celebrate because everything is repeated in a mystical manner, in the present.

The Annunciation, the Birth of Christ, the Circumcision, the Baptism, the Transfiguration, the Passions, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Pentecost, and the feast-days of all the Saints, are not merely events that took place in the past, which we now recall so that they may become examples for us. They are something far more: they are the actual experiences of our Church. They are the very Person and the opus of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, which is kept alive in the life of our Church. It is the inner experience of the Church and of every faithful, of a reality that is already present (cmp. Matth.16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27, 17:21).

3. The cycle of feast-days linked to the Birth of Christ

The feast-day of the Birth of Christ - which is the expression of God's love for fallen man (John 3:16) - has a 40-day preparatory fasting period that encloses the Birth, the Circumcision and the Baptism of the Lord, and is completed on the Sunday after the Epiphany.

The hymns of our Church are the expression of joy by man and the entire Creation for the event of salvation. A joy that is transformed into a full glorification of the Saviour Christ.

«Christ is born - glorify!
Christ from the heavens - meet Him!
Christ is on earth - rise up!
Sing to the Lord, all of earth, and with delight;
extol Him, o peoples, for He is glorified! ».

«The Virgin today gives birth to the Hypersubstantial One
and the earth presents the cave to the unreachable One.

Angels, along with shepherds offer glorification;
Magi, along with a star travel together;
for a New Child was born for our sake: the pre-eternal God».

Hymns always depict the whole God-human event. In the eyes of the faithful, the divine infant is not merely a "child" - a weak, newborn child; it is (and simultaneously remains) the "hypersubstantial" and "unreachable" One Who is born and is "presented" for the salvation of mankind.

The hymns of the Circumcision and the Baptism of the Lord move along the same lines:

«*A form inalterably human did You assume while being God in essence o most compassionate Lord, and, fulfilling the Law, You did willfully condescend to fleshly circumcision, so that You may cease all that is obscure and withdraw the cover of our passions. Glory to Thy righteousness; glory to Thy compassion, glory to Thy inexpressible condescension, o Logos*.».

«*When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, worship of the Trinity wast made manifest; for the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truth of His word. O Christ our God, Who hath appeared and enlightened the world, glory to Thee.*».

4. The cycle of feast-days of Pascha (Easter)

The Paschal cycle is the climax of the ecclesiastic year and it commences with the Triodion. On the Sunday of the Tax-Collector and the Pharisee, then Meat Fare Sunday, then Cheese Fare Sunday and the rest of the Sundays of Great Lent, we are introduced into the life of repentance and the stadium for intense ascesis.

«Let us avoid lofty words and instead learn the tax-collector's humble manner, crying out with sighs to the Saviour: 'Have mercy on us, as the only conciliatory One'».

«...having foolishly defected from your paternal glory, I squandered in bad things the wealth that you delivered to me, thus I cry out to You in the Prodigal's voice: 'I have sinned before You, merciful Father; accept me the repentant and do with me as You would with one of Your servants».

«The stadium of virtues has opened; enter, you who who intend to train, girding yourselves with the beneficial struggle of fasting, for, those who train legally are rightfully awarded; and, on taking up the armor of the Cross, we battle against the enemy, having faith as an impenetrable wall and prayer as our breastplate and charity as our helmet; instead of a knife, having fasting - which excises from the heart every malice. He who does all these things will receive the victory wreath by the King of all - Christ - on the day of judgment».

This spiritual battle and alertness culminate during the Holy Week of Easter, where the faithful are called upon to meet Christ and to secretly experience His Passions.

«Behold, the Bridegroom is coming, in the middle of the night; and blessed is the servant who will be found alert. Unworthy however is the one who will be found negligent. Take care therefore, o my soul, that you won't be overtaken by sleep, for fear you will be delivered to death, and be shut out of the

Kingdom. Instead, recover, crying out 'Holy, holy, holy are You, o God; through the Theotokos, have mercy on us! ».

«Today, He is being suspended on wood, Who had suspended the earth upon the waters; A crown of thorns is placed upon His head, Who is the King of Angels. A false mantle is wrapped around Him, Who wrapped the skies with clouds. He condescended to being slapped, Who in the Jordan freed Adam. With nails He was affixed, Who is the Bridegroom of the Church. A lance has pierced the Son of the Virgin. We bow before Your Passions, o Christ. Show us also Your glorious Resurrection».

On the evening of the Resurrection the faithful and all of Creation live within an endless light. It is the light of joy and of metamorphosis. Everything enters and participates in it:

«Now, everything is filled with light - the sky and the earth and the underworld. Let all of Creation therefore celebrate the Raising of Christ, by which it was made secure».

«We celebrate the mortification of Death, the unmaking of Hades, the commencement of another, eternal life. And leaping for joy, we praise its Cause: the only blessed and most glorious God of our Fathers».

The faithful, therefore, do not find themselves in just any ordinary day. It is the commencement of "another, eternal life". The "eighth day" has already risen, and it is in this un-setting day that we praise "Christ unto the ages"».

The Paschal cycle closes with the pursuant Sundays - of Thomas, of the Myrrh-bearers, of the Paralytic, of the Samaritan woman and of the blind man.

5. The cycle of the Pentecost

The third cycle of the liturgical year is the cycle of the Pentecost. It begins with the feast-day of our Lord's Ascension and leads us into the Reign of the Holy Spirit.

At the moment of His Ascension the Lord promises His disciples that He will send the Holy Spirit, Who will render them His witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8). This is the event that the hymns of our Church analyze:

«You were taken up in glory, o Christ our God, thus gladdening Your disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit, making them certain with this blessing that You are the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world».

Christ's opus for the salvation of the world was completed on the day of the Pentecost. The Holy Spirit revealed to the Apostles the whole mystery of the divine love and rendered them able to become fiery heralds of Christ.

«The Holy Spirit: light and life and a virtual source of life. Spirit of wisdom, Spirit of prudence, benevolent, direct, intellectual, sovereign, removing all trespasses. Both Deity (God) and deifying, both fire and product of fire, uttering, acting, distributing the charismas, through Whom all the Prophets and Apostles of God had been crowned, along with martyrs. A foreign sound, a foreign sight: fire, dividing itself into distributed charismas».

Man is no longer scattered. The age of Babel is past. A new era has dawned for mankind. It is the era of unity in the Body of Christ (cmp.Gen.11:1-9; Acts 2:5-12; Revel.7:9-10).

«When descending, the Most High One confused the tongues and partitioned nations; when He partitioned the flames, He invited everyone to unity, and we -accordingly- glorify theMost Holy Spirit».

The result of the divine light - the "violent rush of wind" of the Pentecost - as the consequence of man's return to his unity with the Holy Trinity, is his return to the upright and true faith. It furthermore is the true veneration of the one and only Triune God, Who is the salvation of mankind.

«We have seen the true light, we have received a heavenly spirit, we have found the true faith, in venerating the indivisible Trinity, for that is what saved us».

Throughout this period, Christians are living inside the light of the Resurrection; they are standing on Mount Tabor and are living the inexpressible joy of the Transfiguration. The Orthodox Church forbids genuflexion during this period. The standing position is the stance of the Resurrection, whereas genuflexion (kneeling) is a stance of mourning and repentance. It is for this reason that we see the righteous around the throne of God in a standing position (Revel.20:12).

But now, we hear once again for the first time the Deacon's exhortation:

«Again, and again, on bended knees let us beseech the Lord »!

The faithful are exhorted to return to the world, which is in the fallen state and corruption, in order to convey the message of joy and hope by the Holy Spirit. In this way, the world acquires meaning once again. It is bestowed with meaning!

6. The Sunday cycle

Each time that Christians congregate to perform the divine Eucharist and especially each Sunday, the event of the Resurrection and of the Pentecost are repeated. That is why the people chant with enthusiasm at the end of each divine Liturgy:

«We have seen the true light; we have received a heavenly spirit... ».

Then, afterwards, the priest exhorts all the churchgoers to return once again to the world in order to transmit that joy and this redemptive message:

«In peace let us go forth! »

With all the above it becomes obvious that in the liturgical year, it is not about certain specific dates and specific hours that a Christian is called upon to live differently, forgetting his pursuits and the daily problems of life. In other words, it is not about certain interruptions in man's daily toils. On the contrary, whatever the Christian lives in the liturgical space, he is called upon to continue throughout all his life. His entire life is required to be illuminated and to acquire meaning from that central event of the Resurrection and the Pentecost. But this is not an easy matter for man in this lifetime. That is why every now and then he must return to the liturgical space, re-live the joy of the Resurrection and the Pentecost, in order to go

back into the world with renewed strength, until the Coming of the Lord becomes a reality, when man's entire life -and the entire world's- is finally living a perpetual divine Liturgy within the perpetual glory of the Resurrection and the Pentecost (cmp.Revel.21:22-25, 5; Isaiah 60:1-22).

Chapter 29 - The Orthodox Ethos

1. The Eighth Day

When the Apostle Paul speaks of true godliness, he refers to it as a "great mystery":

«...***great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed by the world, Received up in glory.*** » (1 Tim.A' Τιμ. 3,16).

As we can see, the mystery of godliness that the Apostle speaks of, relates to the event of Christ's Incarnation. This must not seem strange to us, because Christ's Godmanhood comprises the salvation and the glory of human nature (1 John 4:9-10, 14; Gal.4:4-5).

Godliness therefore has nothing to do with any attempts by man, but with the mystery of the love of the Triune God, Who actualizes salvation through the event of the Son's Incarnation. The true nature of man, his true life, does not have its source in earthly elements, but in the very Triune God Himself, because man is an image of God. Consequently, if we want to seek man's true life, we must approach God - we must savour the life of God.

With the above, we can perceive how only a life near God can be characterized as a natural life - that is, a life that responds to man's true nature - whereas a life far away from God is an "unnatural" life. We need to mention here that what people characterize usually as a life according to "nature" does not refer to man's true nature, but to the one that is under the rule of sin - under the rule of corruption and death.

This is not an exaggeration. It is a simple consequence of the true nature of man, who is an image of the divine nature; a simple consequence of the true life of man, which is an image of the life of the Triune God. The Person of the God-man Christ is the image of the invisible God (Colos.1:15), subsequently, with His Incarnation, Christ revealed God's pure image of God, and with His life, the image of the life of the Triune God.

In the Person of the Lord, divine nature became joined to human nature, «***inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably***» (4th Ecumenical Synod), so that Christ would be the partaker, not only of of the divine but also of the human life; in other words, a true god-man (John 1:1, 14). Consequently, when man - through Baptism - "***puts on Christ***" (Gal.3:26) and through the divine Eucharist becomes "one with His Body and His Blood" (cmp. 1 Cor.10:16-17, 11:24-25; Matth.26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:9-20; John 6:51-58), and once again attains the communion and the unity with the Triune God, which he had fallen away from. Thus man's salvation becomes a reality, for which the Lord had prayed: «***that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, [...] that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me;*** » (John 17:21-23). This is the way that man's participation in the divine life - that is, in salvation - becomes possible.

The above prove why it is not possible for man to be saved when he rejects this salvific faith in the "great mystery of godliness" (1 Tim.3:16) - in the fact of Christ's godmanhood. If Christ is a creation - as blasphemously proclaimed by people of delusion - then man cannot be saved. One creation cannot save another creation (cmp. Psal.48:8). We, however, know from the Holy Bible that the Lord is not a creation, but the "***beginning of the Creation of God***" - that is, the cause of all Creation (Revel.3:14). "***For in Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible..."*** (Colos.1:16. cmp. John 1:3-4). We also know that the Lord ***"...Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery*** *(*usurpation*)* ***to be equal with God";*** instead, albeit having pre-eternally a "divine existence" (being in the form of God), "***made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant...***" (Philip.2:6). With the Incarnation, therefore, of the Son and Logos of God and through the rebirth of man "in Christ", man is once again rendered an image of the Trinitarian God; his life once again becomes an image of the Trinitarian God's life.

In this manner, with his way of life, the truly spiritual person brings back to the surface the image of the Trinitarian God that he hides inside him (Rom.14:8; 2 Cor.5:15; Gal.2:20; Philip.1:21); not the one that has become vile on account of sin, but the restored image, which he has regained thanks to his union with Christ.

This, therefore, is the reason the Apostle Paul characterizes piety as a "major mystery" and links it to the mystery of Christ's incarnation and man's glory to the God-Man Christ (ascended in glory); that is to say, the nature that Christ had assumed, was elevated - thanks to His Ascension - as far up as the Throne of God ("...and ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father..."). Therefore, during the Lord's glorious Ascension, each person who has put on the incorruptible Body of the Lord has been "co-resurrected" and "co-glorified", "in Christ" (cmp.1 Cor.15:40, 53, 10:16, 12:12-13, 27) and has become "a new man", reconciled with God "in one body, through the Cross" (see the entire passage: Ephes. 2:11-22; cmp 1:18-23).

We must take notice of this especially, because there are deluded people who preach "another gospel", which they unashamedly call "The Good News". We, however, of all that has been previously outlined, have understood that hope for our salvation is based on the event of Christ's Godmanhood, in the Gospel of "reconciliation through Jesus Christ" (2 Cor.5:18-19; Rom. 5:11). This was the gospel that was delivered to us by the Apostles (the ministry of reconciliation, 2 Cor.5:18; evangelizing peace, Rom.10:15; see also 1 Cor.1:18, 23; Rom.10:8-9; 1 John 5:11-13; 1 Cor.15:3; Acts 20:21; also cmp. Gal.1:8). This was the gospel that Christ Himself had preached (Eph.2:17; also, cmp. John 17:21-23). Consequently, whoever does preach "another gospel" falls into the anathema of the Holy Bible (Gal.1:8).

Following the above, we can now understand the salvific words of the Holy Bible:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full." (1 John 1:1-4).

This, therefore, is the "good news": the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and this is where the secret of our piety lies - the mystery of the Orthodox ethos : Each Christian acquires spiritual hypostasis and a spiritual life, based on their personal partaking of the mystery of the God-Man Christ.

2. The Η ανυπόστατος πίστις

When referring to the spiritual life, the Apostle Paul says that the beginning of man's hypostasis is his living faith in the truth: "***For we have become partakers of Christ if we keep the beginning of our hypostasis certain, to the end***"; that is, we shall be partaking of Christ, if we actually preserve to the end the faith by which we received our true hypostasis and were reborn in Christ (Hebr.3:14). And this is because (as the Apostle himself mentions) "***without faith, it is impossible for one to please God***" (Hebr.11:6; cmp.Rom.3:22-23; 5:1; 10:8-9).

It is obvious that here we are referring to the upright faith, to the Logos of God, Who is the Truth that sets man free (John 8:32), sanctifies him (John 17:17) and opens the path towards life (John 14:6).

"Faith is definitely demanded" says Saint Cyril of Alexandria, "but before all else, the upright one", he adds. However, this is not about a faith in theoretical truths; it is about our faith in the Person per se of Christ (John 14:6, 1:17; Hebr.1"1).

When Saint Maximus speaks of the faith, he implies the "hypostatized faith" - the Logos of God - Who is incarnate within us; a fact tha is revealed in our entire life ("by incorporating the commandments"). That is what the Apostle meant, when he preached - unhesitatingly - that he himself had ceased to live, and that Christ Himself was incarnate and living within him (Gal.2:20. cmp. Rom.14:8; 1 Cor.5:15; Phil.1:21).

In what manner will the God-Man Christ be incarnate within us, so that our life becomes once again the image of the Triunal God?

" ... whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life," says Christ in John 4:14.

And what water is that? There is no doubt that it implies the teaching of Christ, independently of His Person. It is about the incarnate Truth - the fleshy Logos of God, the hypostatized faith; that is, the faith in the Person of Christ, which has become hypostatized within us.

The Apostle Paul writes with sorrow to the Galatians: "***My little children, for whom I labor in birth again, until Christ is formed in you"*** (Gal.4:19).

3. Love

"***If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; My Father will love him also, and We will come to him and shall make a dwelling with him.***" (John 14:23). The Lord, therefore, gives us the reassurance that the one who loves Him will keep His words. The result of this love in practice shall be the union of man with the Triune God's love, and his partaking of the life of the Holy Trinity: "***My Father will love him also, and We will come to him and shall make a dwelling with him.***" (John 14:23)."

God is entirely love, and God's love is the revelation of the divine life. This is why a person's life - when it is a life of love - becomes an image of God's life. That is when man partakes in the life of the Holy Trinity and becomes the dwelling place of the Triune Gode. "***God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.***" (1 John 4:16).

If the mystery of piety - the content of the Orthodox ethos - relates to the life of love which partakes of the life of the Holy Trinity, it is essential to examine how man can become love. The Apostle Paul says that love - just as all of spiritual living - cannot be achieved with human volition and human labour alone; it is a gift of God, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, Who is poured into every person who is ***"endued with power from on high."*** (Luke 24:49) and is reborn spiritually (‘***And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams*** - Acts 2:17).

"***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires***." (Gal.5:22-24). They were crucified and died together with Christ, and were resurrected unto a new life, "***Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old person was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise, you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***" (Rom.6:4-11).

In order, therefore, to attain love, we need to have overcome all of the passions and the desires of the flesh; that is, to have died along with Christ and be resurrected unto a new life "in Christ". Then, the Holy Spirit - Who blows through and invigorates everything within the Body of Christ - shall render our own heart a dwelling place and will grant us His most valuable gift - love - which constitutes the partaking in the divine life.

There are people with incorrect beliefs, who confine the labours of Christian love to the proclamation of a new gospel, which, as we have seen, leads to perdition (Gal.1:8). Apart from this cacodoxy of theirs, they are also confining their works of charity between "brethren" - that is, between those who have the same conscience as their own. But in order for love to be the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal.5:22), it must be an image of the love of the Triune God, Who is "***decent,to the ungrateful and to the wicked*** (Luke 6:35-36; cmp. Matth.5:45). Only then will love be the fruit of the life that is "in-Christ" - Who "***passed through, benefiting and healing all***..." (Acts 10:38; cmp. James 2:14-26; Matth. 25:34-40; Luke 10:25-37; Isa.58:7-10).

4. Repentance

To reach the fullness of love, we must overcome the old person inside us - the person who had fallen into Satan's enticements and had ceased to have God as his point of reference. That person must first die, in order to make way inside him for the god-human body of Christ. That is why the essential prerequisite in order for man to regain the life of love - which is his true life, the life that corresponds to his nature as the image of God - is repentance.

Man cannot reach the end - perfection - (which is love: Rom13:10), and in fact, the incarnate love - that is, the Person of Christ (Matth.5:17), unless he overcomes his own confinements and every trace of self-complacency and self-understanding to which he had been subjected by Satan. He must realize, deep inside him - that no matter how much he tries to respond to God's love with his actions, those actions are inadequate, and he will always be unworthy of the divine love (cmp.Rom.3:9-31). This is the deep realization that a Christian has to acquire in order to become a person true repentance. It is characteristic, that the Saints of our Church lived with a deep realization of their inability to respond worthily to God's love, and regarded that enduring repentance was the sole matter of their entire lives. Case in point here, is the following, truly moving incident mentioned in the "Gerondikon" (Book of Elders' narrations):

"It was said of Abba Sisoe, that when he was nearing his death, and as the other fathers were seated near him, his countenance began to shine like the sun. And he said to them: "Look, Abba Anthony has arrived!" And after a while he said to them: "Look - there's the chorus of the Prophets!" And again his countenance lit up, even more. And he said: "And there is the chorus of the Apostles!" And his countenance became doubly bright once again. Then -lo- it was as though he was talking to someone. Then the other elders begged him, saying: "With whom are you speaking, father?" He replied: "Look, angels have come to take me away, and I am beseeching them to leave me a while longer so that I may repent." Then the other monks said to him: "You have no need to repent, father." Then the Elder said to them: "Truly I say to you, I do not know if I have even made a start..." And then the others knew that he had indeed become perfect. Suddenly, his countenance again began to shine like the sun and everyone stood in fear. And then he said to them: "See - the Lord has come now, and He is saying "Bring Me that vessel of the desert." Then he immediately delivered up his spirit and something like lightning occurred. And the entire abode was filled with fragrance."

This incident truly hides an immense power. A saint - at the moment of his death and even though his very countenance was radiant with the Uncreated Light - still believed he hadn't even begun repentance.

This profound repentance that we notice in the life of the Saints is - in the opinion of the Fathers of our Church - the commencement of spiritual living. (cmp.Ezek.33:10-15; 1 Cor.10:12; Philip.2:12, 3:8-12).

5. The rending of the heart and the abyss of Divine love

Those who seek vindication with good deeds, with the observance of the commandments or even with any activity whatsoever, will have already departed from Christ. They will have fallen away from Grace and as such, cannot expect salvation (Rom.3:20, Gal.5:4 e.a.). That is why, in the New Testament, only those who confront their sinfulness face to face and look to Christ with complete trust will be saved. They are the "tax-collectors and the prostitutes" as Christ had said: they are the people who will "precede" - will go into the Kingdom of God before those who are certain of their own sense of justice and are relying on that (Matth.21:31; Luke 7:36-50, 18:9-14).

"***Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much",*** Christ characteristically says, about the prostitute (Luke 7:47), and places all the weight on the reciprocation of love, and on the transition of physical love, of selfish love, to divine love. This is expressed in an unprecedented way by our Church, in the Troparion of Holy Tuesday (the hymn written by Kassiane):

"Woe is me! Within me is an unending night, a maniacal passion for debauchery... Please accept my inexhaustible tears... bend, to the sighs of my heart... I shall zealously kiss Your immaculate feet; I shall wipe them with the braids of hair on my head... o my soul-saving Saviour, who shall examine the multitude of my sins, and who the unfathomable depths of Your verdicts?"

This transition of man;s phronema (conscience), who confronts the edge of the abyss where he stands - that rending of his heart and at the same time the awareness of God's abyss of love, is the characteristic sign of the Orthodox conscience. This truth is conveyed in a unique manner by the troparia of the Great Canon:

"I have sinned; like the whore I cry out to You; I alone have sinned before You... accept, o Saviour, my tears also..." "Have mercy... like the tax-collector I cry out to You, o Saviour, have mercy on me, for no-one of Adam but You alone, Saviour, my God, can grant it."

"Let the humbled ones who have been conquered by passions take courage" says Saint John of the Ladder, "for, even if they fall into all the pits, and even if they become entrapped in every trap, and even if they are afflicted by all illnesses, they will - after being healed - become physicians to everyone and teachers and lamps and governors: they will teach the character of the illness and with their experience, will rescue those who are in danger of falling."

And elsewhere, the same saint says:

"I saw unclean souls which were possessed by an insatiable carnal love and, based on the experience of that love which they acquired, had turned that same love around towards the Lord, and thereafter became grafted in an insatiable love for God. This was the reason that the Lord did not say to that sensible whore to be afraid, but instead, told her that because she had loved so much, she was able to fend off carnal love with divine love."

Based on the above, we can now easily understand why Saint Isaac the Syrian had said that "Whosoever is capable of seeing his own sins, is better than one who can raise the dead."

Words like these give hope and certainty to each and every sinful soul that will abandon sin and become flooded with divine love:

“I will rise now and go about in the city, in the market-places and in the streets, and I will seek him whom my soul loved. ***I sought him but found him not. The sentinels who go about in the city found me. 'Have you not seen him whom my soul loved?' Scarcely had I passed from them until I found him whom my soul loved. I took hold of him and would not let him go until I brought him into my mother’s house and into the chamber of her who conceived me."*** (Song of Songs 3:2-4).

6. The Christification of man

Divine "eros" (love) - the union of man with the God-man - takes place within the very Body of Christ, which is the Church (Eph.1:22, 5:23; Colos.1:18, 24).

The descent of the Holy Spirit during the hour of the Divine Eucharist transforms the bread and the wine into Body and Blood of Christ. This god-human Body and Blood then becomes food and drink for the

entire congregation of the faithful. This god-human Body then ceases to be a simple congregation of people; it becomes "Church". The Church is not a human institution. It is a god-human institution, which is "assembled" - joined internally into a harmonious whole - by the Holy Spirit, as the hymn of our Church says.

Each person in the Church is "Christified" and becomes one with all his other brethren. Better still - in that god-human union, he, along with his brethren, actually becomes the god-human Body of Christ. (Gal.3:28; 1 Cor.12:13; Colos.3:11). The centre of the Christians' unity is not, consequently, a certain common objective, or certain common aspirations; it is the Triune God Himself - the image of God, which constitutes the true nature of man.

In this way is man's purpose fulfilled; man's salvation is realized, for which Christ had sacrificed His Blood. God's children, which were scattered after the Fall, are once again gathered together as one whole (John 11:52) and regain the true meaning of their life, which is man's partaking of the life of the Holy Trinity.

"For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread". The bread is one and we, the many, are one body, because we all partake of that one bread (1 Cor.10:17).

As such, piety, the mystery of man's salvation, the Orthodox ethos, are not a personal matter, but a liturgical praxis. And the personal piety of each faithful is analogous to the degree of his personal partaking of the Body of Christ - his organic and conscientious participation in the Body of the Church. By means of this participation in Christ's life, man is once again rendered a participant in the life of the Triune God. It is on this fact that our salvation relies.

7. The battle against the devil

When we say that the Orthodox ethos is a liturgical one - that it involves partaking in the Body of Christ - we do not imply any passive state, but rather, man's entry into a spiritual arena. It is the Christian's battle "***against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age,against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places***" (Eph.6:12).

The devil is a ***"homicidal murderer"*** and "***a liar and the father of lies***" (John 8:44). He never ceases therefore to wander about "***like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"*** (1 Pet.5:8).

A Christian must never forget this for even one moment. The demonic element is a reality and the faithful is called upon to remain vigilant. "***Be sober, be vigilant!***", says the Word of the Lord (1 Pet.5:7). "***Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might***." (Ephes.6:10 onwards). Remain firm in the faith, ***"knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."*** (1 Pet.5:9). ***"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are modest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are dear, whatever things have a good report or any virtue or anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."*** (Philip.4:8-9).

Satan always tampers with our senses and strives to generate passions in order to enter us and become our overlord from within. This is why a Christian is called upon to confront the adversary fully equipped and obeisant to God. The life of repentance, of humility and of ascesis leads the Christian to the forsaking

of his personal will and the adoption of God's will. It leads him to the death of his self and into the life "in Christ". Whoever wants to live, he must first die; ***"...whoever loses his life for My sake will find it,"*** says the Lord characteristically (Matth.16:25, 10, 39; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24, 17:33; John 12:25).

8. Ascesis

"However, this kind does not depart, except by prayer and fasting." (Matth.17:21; Mark 9:29). This species does not leave, except only through prayer and fasting...

With these words, the Lord revealed to us how we can resist Satan's dominance victoriously. It is upon this basis that ascesis finds vindication in the life of the faithful. With his disobedience, the first human had transferred the centre of his life from the Triune God to his own person. This was the serpent's lure to which Adam had succumbed and had thus fallen under Satan's dominance (Gen.3:1-7).

With an ascetic way of life, the Orthodox Christian no longer places himself at the centre of his life; he no longer has his personal will as motive. On the contrary, his objective is to transcend his personal evaluations, his entire self, and surrender himself wholly to Christ, in body and soul, completely, and unconditionally.

"We become the body members of Christ; our limbs are Christ, and the arm is Christ, and the leg is Christ, of me, the wretch... both my arm is Christ and my leg is Christ; I, the wretch, move my arm, and Christ is my entire arm. For, in my mind, God's divinity is indivisible."

The fact of man's Christification fills the heart of Saint Simeon with wonder, but also with absolute respect for the human body; it renders him vigilant, so that he may be proven worthy of the greatest honour:

"And I am amazed at myself, when I realize who I have become miraculously, from who I used to be. And I respect and am modest about myself, and honour and am in awe of myself as though it is You, and I wonder, entirely ashamed, where I can sit, and whom I can approach, and where I am to lay my limbs; in what labours, in what such acts could I make use of the fearsome and divine?"

THE END